

# RESIDENCE, GENDER AND POWER IN THE GARO SOCIETY OF BANGLADESH

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By  
**Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury**

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**Dissertation for the Degree of Ph.D  
Department of Anthropology  
University of Dhaka.**

2006

**Residence, Gender and Power in the Garo Society of  
Bangladesh**

By  
Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury

**A Dissertation**

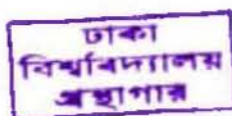
Submitted to  
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**Doctor of Philosophy**

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August 2006

## Declaration

The material embodied in this thesis is original. No part of it, in any form, has been submitted to any other university or academic institution for any degree, academic award or publication elsewhere.

  
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Dedicated to  
my mother, wife, son and daughter

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**Abstract**

**Residence, Gender and Power in the Garo Society of Bangladesh**

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This is a village study, based on intensive fieldwork conducted in Mandigaon village of Jhenaigati Upazila (Sub-district) in Sherpur District. In this research an attempt has been made to investigate into the process of change in the residence pattern of the Garos and its implications on gender role and male and female power in their society. In doing so, both historical and anthropological perspectives have been used to analyze empirical and qualitative data gathered from intensive fieldwork, past historical and ethnographic records, oral histories, informal interviews, and case studies.

Garos are one of the unique examples of matrilineal societies in the world. Their matrilineality is characterized by a kinship system where descent, inheritance and overall social identity all follow female lines. Their post-marital residence pattern is matrilocal since after marriage a woman remains in her mother's household while her husband moves to her residence. However, in the present circumstances residence pattern of the Garos seems to be in a transition from matrilocal to patrilocal owing to the present social and economic considerations.

Mandigaon is now a mixed village of three ethnic communities: Bangali Muslim, Hajong and Garo. Despite many similarities, the Garos of the village are different in many respects from other communities. Until recently, they have maintained a separate identity in many areas of their lives, but the process of transformation continued and gradual changes occurred in their economic pattern, social structure and kinship system with the influences of outside factors. As a result attitude towards traditional marriage, residence and inheritance is changing rapidly.

In spite of the fact that Garos follow apparently a rigid kinship rule, residence appeared to be flexible in the village. A wide variation of residence choice is noticed in the village. Matrilocal pattern is the ideal type and still predominant in the village; however, patrilocal and neolocal are observed as increasing in a frequent way. Households in a joint family structure of the Garos, in the most cases, are observed living in a state of both matrilocal and patrilocal setting. Although in such a situation, structural

conflicts arise in respect of adjustment, gender role, power and identity of spouses, society tends to accommodate many things in the framework of matrilineal kinship system.

Findings of this study reveal that patrilocal and neolocal are more common among young generation couples than parental generation couples. Furthermore, preference of patrilocal and neolocal residence is more prevalent among urban living couples than the Garos living in the village. Urban dwelling couples are, generally, quite young. This trend represents changing outlook of the young Garos in respect of residence choice.

The present study shows a very strong correlation between residence and inheritance pattern. Parent's discretion regarding transmission of property mainly depends on choice of residence. Traditional inheritance rules only work to that extent where choice of residence makes no difference regarding access to resources and kin-support. Son's preference in relation to transmission of property has been an increasing trend. This is no doubt a fundamental shift from matrilineal principle. If this trend continues, future shape of inheritance pattern may take a different look.

Finding shows that implications of residence are significant on gender roles and power among Garos in the village. Village identity and household identity always make a difference in respects of gender role and access to resources. However, gender role in households appeared quite balanced since influences of matrilineal kinship principles have been profound on them.

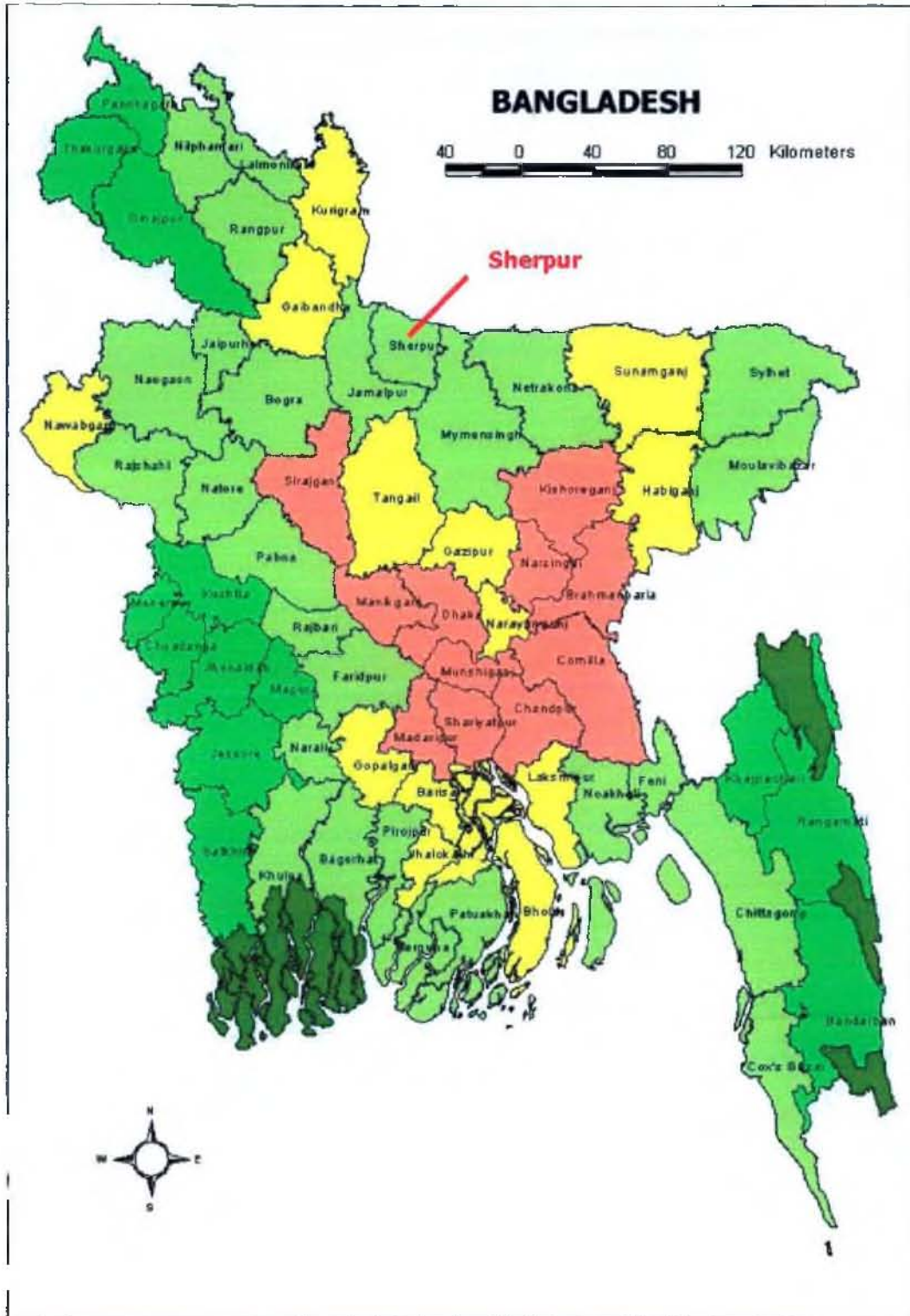
The study also reveals that several factors are involved in the process of change in residence pattern of the Garos. Social, economic and psychological preferences of individual and group members have been working as reasons for varied types of residence options. Garos of the village are vulnerable to other culture, and influences of Christianity and surrounding patrilineal people are overwhelming on their lives. Besides, education, technological changes, works and income, process of urbanization, and GO and NGO activities are important variables in determining residence choice of the couples.



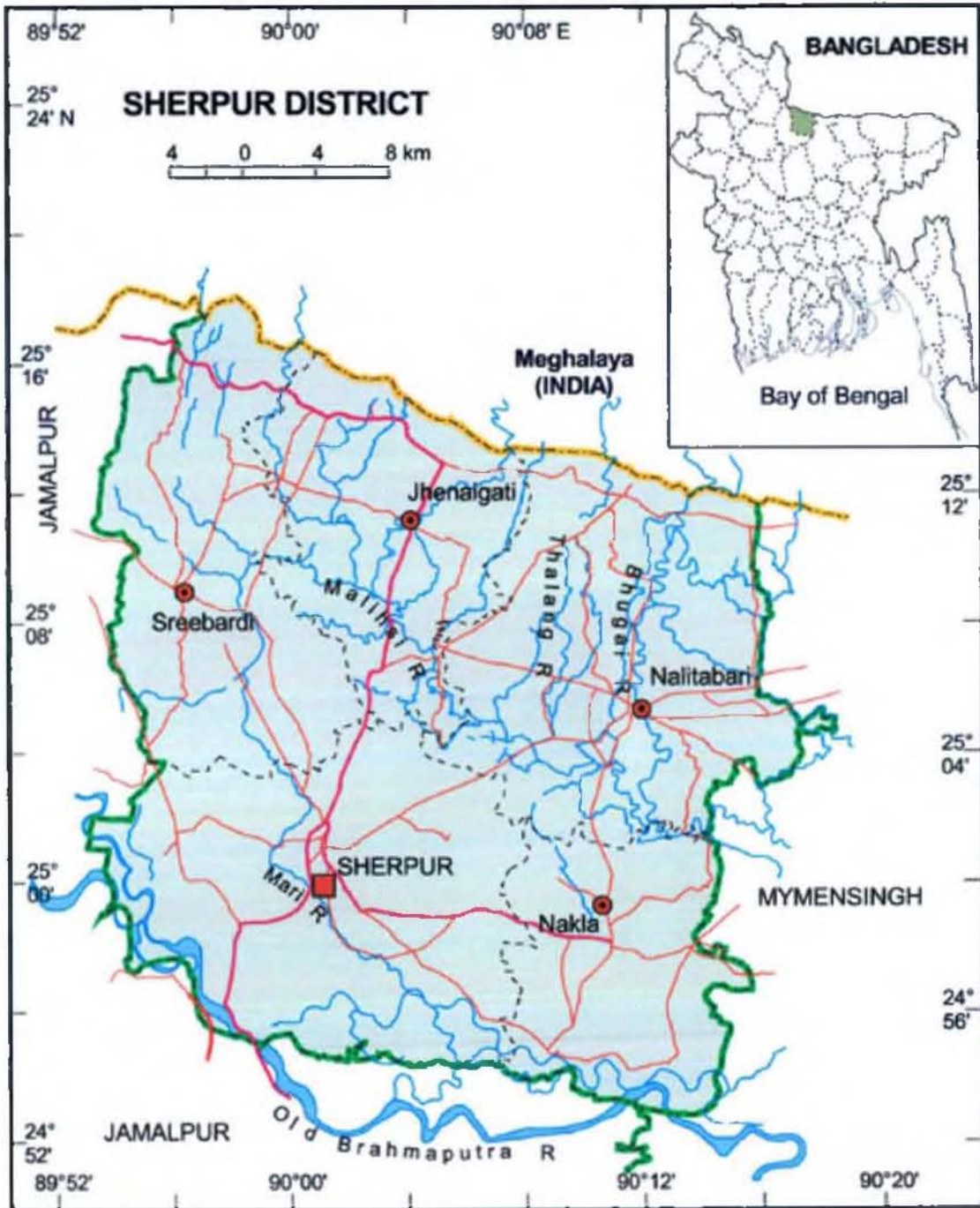
## Acronyms

<b>BANSDOC:</b>	Bangladesh National Scientific and Technical Documentation Centre
<b>BBS:</b>	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
<b>BRAC:</b>	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
<b>BRDB:</b>	Bangladesh Rural Development Board
<b>CCULB:</b>	The Cooperative Credit Union League of Bangladesh
<b>CEO:</b>	Chief Executive Officer
<b>CHT:</b>	Chittagong Hill Tracts
<b>DU:</b>	Dhaka University
<b>EPI:</b>	Extended Program on Immunization
<b>GO:</b>	Government
<b>HIES:</b>	Household Income & Expenditure Survey
<b>IUCN:</b>	The World Conservation Union
<b>NGO:</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>RIB:</b>	Research Initiatives Bangladesh
<b>PRSP:</b>	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
<b>SEHD:</b>	Society for Environment and Human Development
<b>TCA:</b>	Tribal Cultural Academy
<b>TWA:</b>	Tribal Welfare Association
<b>UNO:</b>	Upazila Nirbahi Officer (Sub-district Executive Officer)

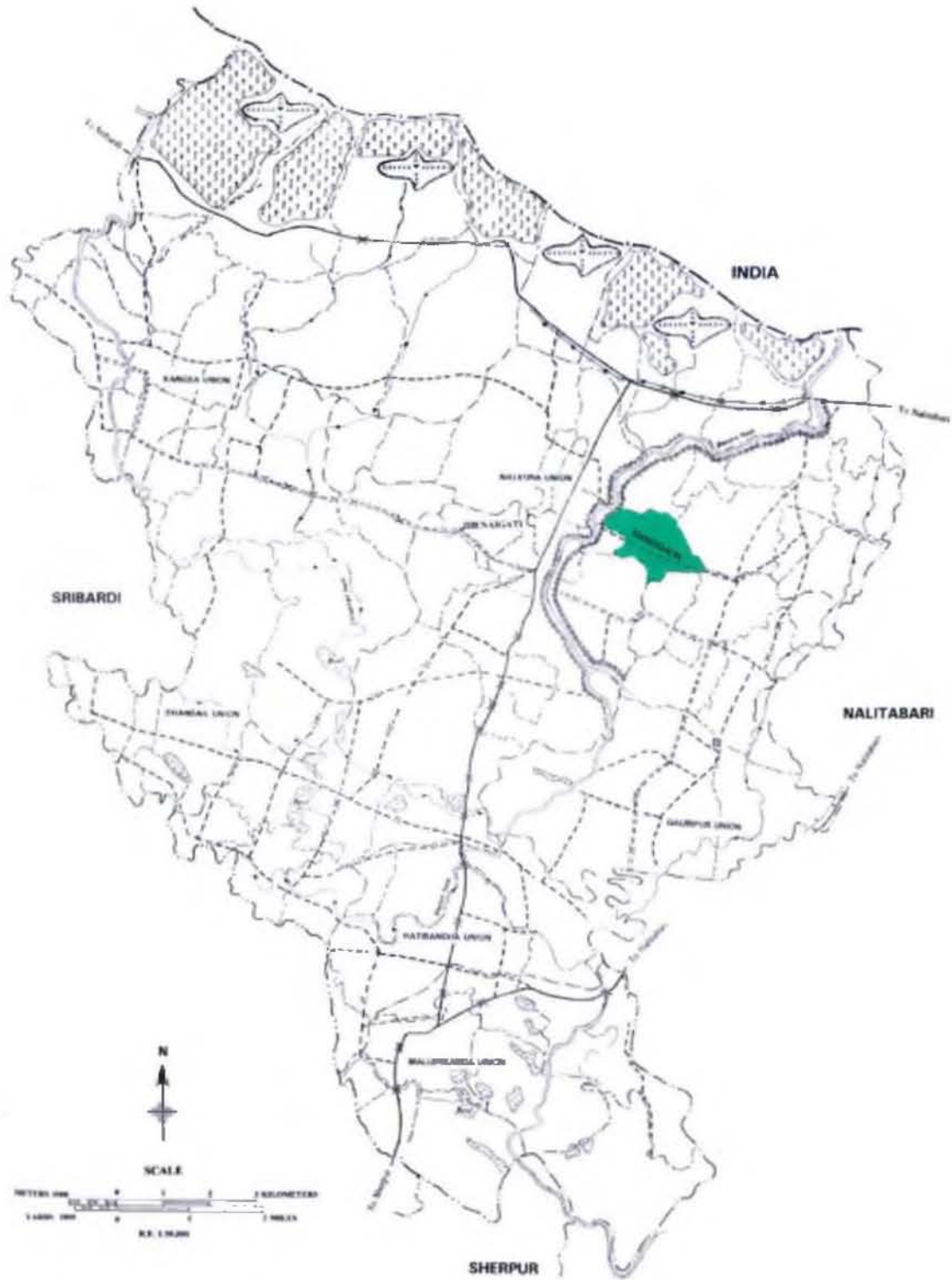
Map 1: Bangladesh



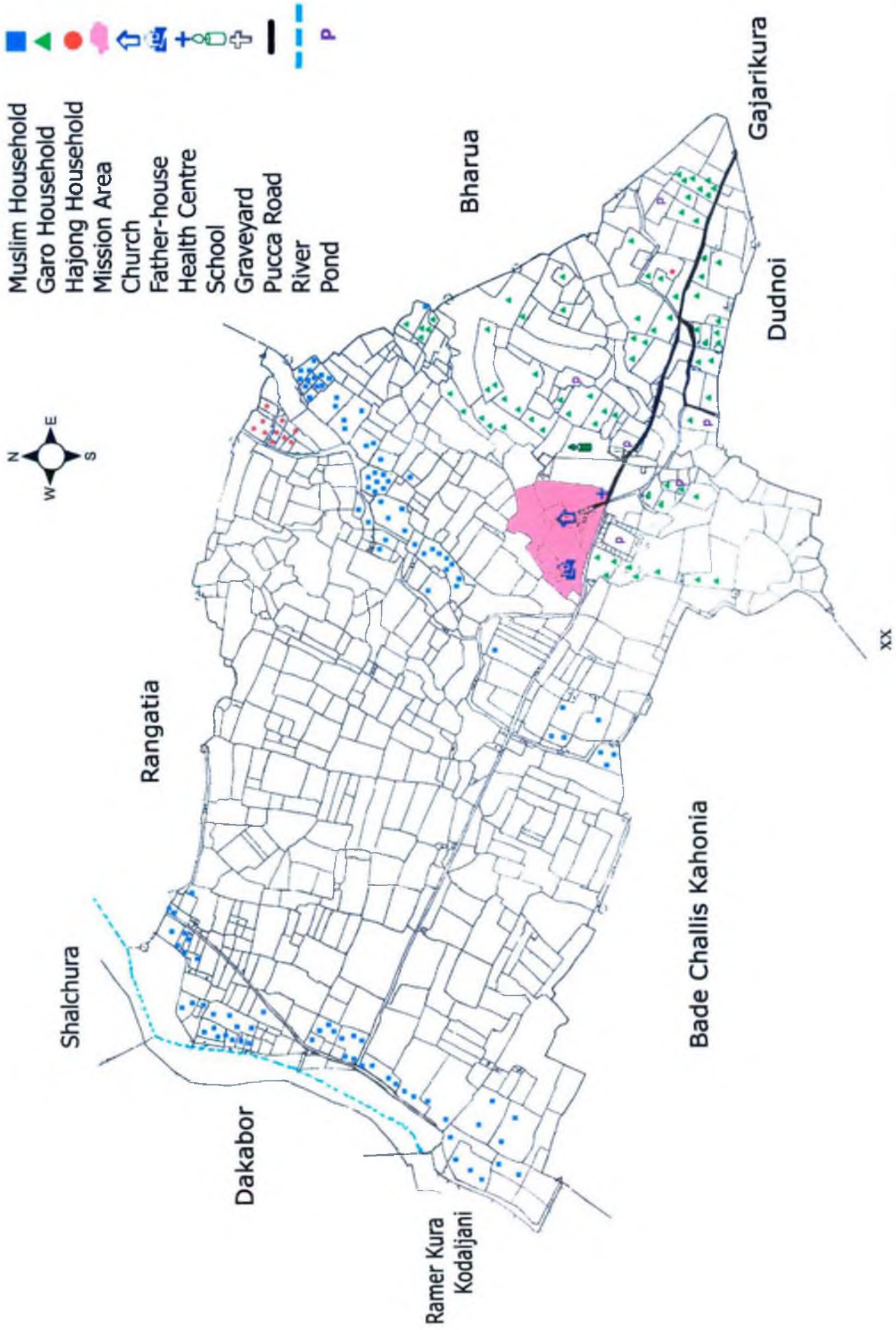
Map 2: Sherpur District



Map 3: Jhenaigati Upazila



Map 4: Mandigaon Village



## Chapter-I

### Introduction

#### 1.1 Introduction

The focus of this study is the Garos (Mandi)<sup>1</sup>, a small matrilineal ethnic community of Bangladesh, particularly, about the changes in their residence pattern and its implications on gender role and male and female power in the society. The findings presented and conclusions drawn in this thesis are the outcome of an intensive fieldwork in Mandigaon village of Sherpur District.

The Garos are one of the classical examples of matrilineal people in the subcontinent. Their matrilineality is illustrated by an apparently rigid kinship system where descent and inheritance reckon through female line. They are divided into different exogamous kinship groups and sub-groups and geographically sparse to many places of Bangladesh and India. There are obvious differences that exist among these groups; still they maintain same kinship system. Among them, descent groups are unilineal and constitute “lineage”s in the strict sense of the term. Every Garo belongs to the lineage group of the mother. They take their mother’s family name. They are not allowed to marry within their own group. Inheritance follows matrilineal line of descent and men do not inherit property of parents either movable or immovable. It all goes to the women. Indeed, kinship is the main organizing principle of Garo social organization and it determines role of women and

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<sup>1</sup> Garos are living in different parts of Bangladesh and India. Garos of Bangladesh use the name *Mandi* and Indian Garos refer themselves as *A'chik*. Garos of further north in India also call them *Mandei* or *Mande*. Since it is difficult to draw imaginary lines about who call themselves *A'chik* or *Mande* or *Mandi*, in this thesis I have preferred to use the term “Garo” for the sake of the convenience of my discussion. However, the term “Mandi” has also been used in several occasions.

men in the society. Although, they are surrounded by patrilineal neighbors, uniqueness of matrilineal kinship system set them apart from other communities.

However, residence pattern is not always an indicator of matrilineality. In matrilineal system, difference is mostly observed in the pattern of residence. For example matrilineal Nayers of Central Kerala follows a dulocal residence pattern where after marriage spouses stay in their respective natal houses. With respect to the Garos, kinship and residence are significantly interrelated phenomenon. Their residence pattern is 'matrilocal' or 'uxorilocal', where as a rule, husband moves to wife's house after marriage. Patrilocality is the most common form of residence in the world and most of the societies follow this pattern of residence. There are variations in the choice of residence in different socio-economic situation. Present trend shows that in urban areas societies are becoming increasingly neolocal. However, notably in Asia, residence rules tend to continue to conform with the patrilocal tradition (Chant, 1997:107). In case of the Garos, in practice, residence pattern seems to be in a transition from matrilocal to patrilocal due to the present social and economic considerations that combine with the influence of the neighboring patrilineal people.

During the first phase of my fieldwork in Mandigaon<sup>2</sup> village, the study location of my research, I have noticed a wide variation in the pattern of post-marital residence. Number of patrilocal residence pattern is increasing substantially. These instances of change generated my interest to explore

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<sup>2</sup> Following common anthropological convention I have used pseudo name of the study village. However, other places have been mentioned by their real names.

through an in-depth study the changes of post-marital residence pattern and its impact on gender relation and power in the Garo society.

## 1.2 The Problem and Rationale

Bangladesh is a place of ethnic diversity. Official documents and ethnographic literatures give different statistics about the number of small ethnic communities living in Bangladesh. In *Tribal Cultures of Bangladesh* (Qureshi: 1984), different writers have mentioned different number of ethnic communities. For example, Bertocci (1984: 346) mentioned the number as 12, Samad (1984:54) as 15 and Maloney (1984:8-22) as 46. In the census of 1991 the number of them has been mentioned as 29. Since it has become difficult to determine actual number of the small ethnic communities living in Bangladesh, Khaleque left the responsibility of finding the exact number with the future researchers by loosely saying the number as “more than two dozens” (Khaleque: 1995:7). However, in a recent government publication, the number of adivasi/ indigenous communities living both in the hill regions and in the plain lands has been mentioned as about forty-five, and number of their population at present is estimated to be around 2 million (PRSP, 2005:155).

Garos are one of the well-known ethnic communities of Bangladesh and India. Their present population around the world is approximately half a million. Most of them live in the northeast India, mainly in the Garo Hills region, and about one fifth of them live in the bordering areas of Mymensingh, Sherpur, Jamalpur and Netrokona district of Bangladesh. A large number of Garos have been living in Madhupur forest areas of present Tangail district. Garos are also living in Dhaka, Chittagong, Gazipur, Sylhet,



Moulvibazaar and Sunamganj District. According to the government official statistics (Census Report 1991) ethnic population in Bangladesh is 1.2 million, among them number of Garos are 64280. The number might be more now. Some literature suggests that actual number would be about one tenth of a million (Burling: 1997:4).

For a society, change is an inevitable phenomenon as isolation or segregation is not possible due to social and economic inter-dependence. A society may change or transform in many ways in the process of adjustment and assimilation, through contact and intercourse with other people. Change in a society can be situational or conscious development. It is always difficult to draw a straight line of changes since issues involved in the process are often crosscutting. It may depend on historical process as well as interrelated functions and strength of the social organization of a society. Apart from social or economic factors, psychological issues also have considerable significance.

In course of time, Garo society has been changed in many ways. Garos have accepted and absorbed many things from others and adjusted themselves according to the needs and circumstances. In the process, a lot of interesting features of their true heritage have been lost. They may be termed or defined as a peripheral, marginalized, backward or distinct people, as until today the way they are being projected by many. Yet, no longer, they can be defined as an 'isolated' people as they are now in a process of integration with the broader matrix of Bangladesh. Influence of neighboring (patrilineal) people, Christianity, modern education, change in the mode of agriculture, land ownership and tenure system and occupational pattern, these are commonly discussed factors which have brought considerable changes in their life style.

In spite of all this, matrilineality remains as the main organizing principle of their social organization.

There were a few examples of deviation from traditional kinship principles in the past, and at present examples are more. Now instances of change in outlook and material arrangements are clear in many respects. Some Garos seem to be unwilling to take mother's family name. Breaking the tradition some person even goes so far as to marry within his or her own lineage. It is observed that attitude towards customary residence rule has changed significantly in the recent time. Although jointness is inherent in Garo family pattern, number of nuclear and neolocal households are increasing. Changes are also happening in the inheritance pattern. It is observed that instances of land transfer by mothers to their sons are increasing rapidly. These are remarkable departure from matrilineal principles and represent a trend in which Garo society to some extent turns to 'patrilineality'.

Notwithstanding the fact that matrilineal kinship system had received considerable attention of early writers and ethnographers, academic pursuits of them were mainly concentrated on the Garos of Indian part. Other than a few academic endeavors, until recently systematic works on them are negligible (see literature review for details). Jhenaigati Upazila of Sherpur has been an abode of the Garos and some other ethnic community people since long. Even half a century back situation in the area was marked by the presence of a large number of small ethnic people. The situation has now been reversed by the overwhelming existence of mainstream Bangali people. As the Garos have become increasingly vulnerable to other culture or have become part of the process of urbanization, they cannot escape changes.

Garos of the study area are now in a state of dilemma between tradition and modernity, although affinity to kinship remains.

Outcome of this conflict between tradition and new situation might make a synthesis, yet difficult to predict. Gradual changes that become visible in the pattern of post-marital residence have no doubt long-term consequences for the kinship system of the Garos. It can bring many changes in their social organization that in turn can also change residence pattern to a different dimension. As a result, gender role and position of men and women possibly will take a different shape. These changing trends might have several interpretations, but in my view, systematic and in-depth investigation is essential to find the roots of the ongoing changes in their residence pattern and its impact on gender relation and power.

### **1.3 Objectives**

The central concern of my study is to explore the relationship between post marital residence, gender relations and power among the Garos of Bangladesh. Residence is one aspect of social organization of the Garos. Since change in residence pattern has been associated with other considerations, the study also focuses on social, political, economic and environmental consequences of the changes in the kinship system of the Garos. Besides, historical context behind the change is also considered in order to conceptualize the study. Major research questions are:

1. Why and how do change take place in the residence pattern of the Garos and what factors are involved in the process of change?
2. How and to what extent residence pattern shapes gender roles and affect male and female power in the Garo society?

#### **1.4 Limitations**

The study was concentrated in a single village, where no research of this kind was conducted before. Since findings presented here are based on primary data gathered through ethnographic fieldwork in the study village, it has limited the scope of a comparative analysis to examine at what extent the pattern of residence in the Garos society has changed than before. Moreover, the study outlined a kind of snap short picture of present situation, which may not have longitudinal implication unless findings are used by other researchers. This might be a limitation in the study.

#### **1.5 Contribution of this Study to Anthropological Knowledge**

Since no Anthropological research was done in the study area before, empirical and observational findings of the study were based on primary data collected through in-depth-field study by the researcher. It is hoped that wealth of information presented here will be added to the anthropological literature related to Garo affairs of Bangladesh, and would contribute to the understanding of the process of social, political, economic and environmental changes in the kinship system of the Garos, particularly roots of the continuing changes in their residence pattern and its impact on gender relation and power. Furthermore, in case of the replication of the study in future, for a comparative analysis, researchers may find the study useful as a baseline information source.

#### **1.6 Research Methodology**

This is a village study with a focus on the changing pattern of its social organization. Here village is taken both as a geographical and a social unit. The village has a mixed population of three ethnic communities: Bangali

Muslim, Garo and Hajong. Although, for the purpose of outlining key features of the village, a comparative statement of the socio-economic characteristics of the village population are presented in chapter III, my central focus is the Garos, particularly change in their residence pattern. For the purpose of the present study, I have mainly concentrated on Garo settlement areas in the village. In this perspective following Blanchet (1984:1), it can be said that I have carried out a village-based micro study on the Garos.

Village studies in Bangladesh have a long and rich tradition (Hye, 1985:1). However, social scientists have been conducting micro-level village studies in Bangladesh for the last six decades or so, and most of these studies have been carried out in course of last 40 years (Chowdhury, 1985b: 130). The most celebrated and methodical village study in Bengal was done by R.K. Mukherjee during the inter-war periods (Hye, 1985:1), and after him many sociologists and Anthropologists, and also a few number of economists have conducted village studies. "The methods followed by most of these researchers in their research are intensive fieldwork or in other words anthropological method or method of participant observation. Some among them have however followed the method of social survey" (Chowdhury, 1985b:131).

Anthropological method is based on ethnographic fieldwork "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world" (Malinowski, 1978:25). It is called method of intensive fieldwork or in other words, the method of participant observation (Chowdhury, 1985b: 134). Tradition of intensive fieldwork was mainly founded by Malinowski (1884-1942) and Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955). Indeed, Malinowski's fieldwork

was what gave rise to modern anthropology, where participant observation made its first foothold (Hamel, 1993:3). Until today, this method is considered as one of the most appropriate methods in understanding human society and culture. The researchers of many other disciplines also use this method. "The cardinal value of fieldwork lies in its ability to provide an intimate understanding of the complex matrices of social institutions and relationships that exists in all societies. Such matrices will continue to exist in the foreseeable future, however much a society gets modernized or globalized. From this point of view, the extension of the method of fieldwork from the study of traditional communities such as tribes, castes, and village to urban communities and to such modern and complex organizations as factories, trade unions, hospitals, law courts, universities and colleges, is an important development. The valuable insight that fieldwork offers into these organizations points to the unlimited possibilities for the continued use of the method in ever newer fields" (Srinivas, 2002: vi)

While doing micro level village studies in Bangladesh almost all anthropologists emphasized on the significance of ethnographic fieldwork and followed participant observation method (e.g., Arens and Beurden 1977, Chowdhury 1978, Bertocci 1978, Blanchet 1984, Arefeen 1986, Islam 1986, Karim 1990, Khaleque 1992, White 1992, Kotalova 1996, Burling 1997, Rozario 2001). Chowdhury particularly suggests, "Method of intensive fieldwork (or participant observation method) is the most suitable method for all kinds of village studies at the micro level. It does not matter whether it is an action-oriented research or a pure academic research. It is the most effective method at this stage of the development of our society" (Chowdhury, 1985b: 141). However he also suggests that this emphasis on

intensive fieldwork may change with the change of time and with further industrialization and development of Bangladesh society (ibid: 141).

Burgess (1982) pointed out that the field researcher has to be a methodological pragmatist using a diversity of method, strategy and tactic (Burgess quoted by Hye, 1985:9). There are other options for quantitative and qualitative research. All methods are tools and have some relevance and value in understanding society and culture from the holistic point of view. In the present circumstances Anthropologists tend to adopt multi-method approach to address a variety of theoretical and practical problems during fieldwork. Flexibility for modification in the field has also been emphasized for eliminating unimportant variables in the process of data collection during fieldwork and to get realistic results (Khaleque, 1992:76).

Although most of my findings of this study are based on anthropological method, along with ethnographic fieldwork, I have also adapted multi-method approach such as, census, informal interviewing, oral histories, and case studies and so on. I have also used advantage of flexibility in doing field research and redesigned my strategies according to needs and circumstances.

Valuable information on past events has been collected mainly from secondary sources, i.e. from books, monographs, journals, articles and souvenirs published on Garo situation. Qualitative data on social, economic and demographic characteristics of the people under study were collected from field censuses conducted in different phases of the fieldwork.

Furthermore, I have organized several focus group discussions and interviewed a good number of Garos to have an idea about their present way of life and changing attitude towards matrilineal principles. Apart from this, schoolteachers, religious leaders, government officials and NGO activists were also discussed and interviewed. Besides, 30 case studies were conducted during the time of fieldwork.

### **1.6.1 First Acquaintance**

I joined as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Sherpur Zila Parishad (District Council) on 19 January 2002. In Bangladesh, Zila Parisad is the highest local Government body at the district level and performs manifold responsibilities related to social, economic, cultural and environmental development of the rural people under its jurisdiction. Greater Mymensing region is one of the two (other being Chittagong Hill Tracts) most prolific areas of ethnic diversity in Bangladesh and Sherpur happens to be a larger part of this uniqueness. Initially I have no intention to do research of this kind. Immediately after my posting at Sherpur I started visiting all the areas of the district to gather ideas about rural development priorities intended to better perform my responsibilities as a Government official. My posting in the area, thus, in this way has provided me an opportunity to be acquainted with the small ethnic people living in the periphery. For long, I was aloof from any systematic academic pursuit, but my anthropological background in graduate and master's level in Dhaka University has infused some impetus in me to make an in-depth investigation into the on-going changes on small ethnic people's lives. Particularly, I have turned to the Garos because, at present they are the majority among the small ethnic



communities living in the area, and furthermore, they are a people of separate identity marked by matrilineal kinship organization, traces of which are uncommon among other neighboring mainstream and small communities in the district.

### **1.6.2 Selection of Village**

In Sherpur, Garos are living mainly in four Upazilas: Nalitabari, Jhenaigati, Sribordi and Sherpur Sadar. I could have turned to any of the places, but I chose Jhenaigati area for the reason that it has majority of the Garo population in the district. Selection of the village was rather a complicated task as the Garos of the area apparently seemed more or less exposed to external factors of change in the same manner and surrounded by patrilineal people of considerable influence. The Upazila has 19 villages where Garos live in. I have prepared a list of the villages inhabited by the Garos and visited some of them in order to select a suitable site for my investigation. After a cautious observation, I have decided to focus on the Garos of Mandigaon village. The main reasons for the selection of Mandigaon are as follows:

1. Mandigaon is a mixed village having population of three ethnic communities such as Garo, Muslim and Hajong.
2. There is a Roman Catholic Mission in the village, named Mariamnagar, which has religious control over the Catholic population of 43 villages both in Sherpur and Jamalpur districts. Mandigaon is much known to others because of the location of this Mission in the village.
3. The village has well road infrastructure facilities. It is about three-kilometers away from Jhenaigati Upazila headquarter.

4. The Garos in the village are not yet exposed to all the modern facilities such as electricity, water supply and so on; but impact of forces of modernity and neighboring culture is obvious on them
5. There is a Primary and a Junior High school in the village, established and run by the Mission where students from Garo and other communities receive education. Its influence is tremendous, and now literacy rate in the village is the highest in Jhenaigati Upazila.
6. Several Government departments are working in the village for the socio-economic development of the people. Other than Government agencies, number of NGOs is engaged in the field of poverty alleviation, education, environment, health care etc. Influence of state and NGO run activities are evident on the present social and economic pattern of the Garos.
7. No anthropological or ethnographic study was done before on the Garos of Jhenaigati area. It appeared to me that pursuing an academic research in the area would contribute to some extent to the anthropological knowledge related to Garo affairs.

### **1.6.3 Ethnographic Fieldwork**

As a Government official I served in Sherpur more than three years from January 2002 to April 2005. Then for the purpose of my research I took deputation from my authority for one year from April 2005 and conducted 11 months intensive fieldwork finishing in March 2006. Indeed a total time of 4 years and 2 months I spent in Sherpur. However, my first year in Sherpur spent with occasional visits to some areas of small ethnic settlement in order to select an appropriate site for the research. Having chosen Mandigaon as my study location, indeed, from the second year, I started

visiting the village occasionally. In the beginning I tried to gather socio-economic information about the people of the area in general, particularly about the Garos of the village. Two educated Garos assisted me in my effort and introduced me with the Garos of the area. Initially, I find difficulties as Garos of the area were a bit doubtful about my intention and treated me like other government officials, and to some extent, shown reservation in their responses. Some of them thought what I was doing was a part of my official duty. Even some wanted to know how they would be benefited from my study. I explained my purpose many times that this was nothing official rather I wanted to write a book in order to obtain a university degree. However after few months of occasional visits, I became known to the villagers and in the process I was able to build some rapport with the people as a researcher.

In the third year I actually embarked on my research work by spending my holidays in the area. I started collecting socio-economic information of the villagers, particularly Garos. During this period I have carried out household census on three ethnic communities living in the village. Besides, Informally I have interviewed many of the Garos and arranged focus group discussions. In this period I have carried out fieldwork coming from Sherpur. I did not stay nights in the village, as my official position also did not allow me to stay my nights in any private house. During that time, I have also visited Tribal Cultural Academy at Birishiri, Netrokona, photocopied some books written on the Garos from the library of the Academy, visited some nearby and remote Garo villages, and had informal discussions with a number of Garos of the Birishiri area.

Although Garos can speak Bangla, in the household affairs they usually communicate each other's with their own language. I did not find much difficulties in understanding their language, since Garos of the village are now bilingual and can articulate most of their expressions in Bangla. Nevertheless, I decided to learn their language and collected a book of Mandi Words compiled by Robbins Burling from the Father of the Mariamjnagar Mission. Although it helped me a lot, there is localized variation among Garo dialects, and the Garos of Mandigaon did not use many of the terminologies included in the said book. They have their own dialects with its different pronunciation. However, in case of confusion, I took help of my key informants, and my day-to-day meetings with the Garos helped me to understand many of their expressions.

In the last year I have carried out intensive fieldwork in the village. Research Initiative Bangladesh provided me financial assistance for doing the fieldwork of this period. Initially I faced some difficulties in finding suitable accommodation in the village and stayed few days in Sherpur and Jhenaigati. Garos in the village are poor and it was difficult for nearly all of them to accommodate a person in their house due to space problem. Afterwards, I managed one affluent Garo family to accommodate me in their house. They arranged both food and lodging for me. They took real trouble for me as my presence in their house no doubt hampered their family privacy. However, after few days they grew more cordial and accepted me as one of their household members. I lived in the village with occasional breaks and carried out intensive fieldwork for 8 months. I spent another 3 months in Dhaka and other places for collecting ethnographic information relevant to the study.

During this time I followed participant observation method. I talked with them directly, moved house to house, observed their life style and day-to-day happenings. I maintained a diary and took personal notes of all the happenings during the fieldwork. Second phase of census to get information about present residence choice of the couples was conducted in this period.

Few informal group discussions participated by both male and female Garos of the village were also organized. At times discussions were held in the premise of different households, sometimes held in the school ground or in other places of spontaneous gathering of the Garo villagers. I also participated in *Wangala* festivals, attended marriage ceremonies and cultural functions in the village to observe present status of traditional festivity and marriage.

I also collected data from mission, other nearby villages, different government and NGO offices. Furthermore, in Dhaka I interviewed a number of Dhaka living Garos of the village and conducted few case studies among them. I also spent few days in Mymensing, and worked in the District collector's library to gather past ethnographic and historical information and anecdotes.

#### **1.6.4 Household Census**

Since household's size and type is changing constantly, I did not rely on any available list of household size, either from past census or from the list maintained by the Mariamnagar Mission. Rather, in order to obtain information about present socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the village, at the out set, I conducted a baseline household census in the study village. In view of the fact that the village has a mixed population of

three ethnic communities, I used three separate sets of interview schedule for each of the communities. The census among three communities was conducted with the help of four schoolteachers of Mariamnagar Junior High School. The census covered all households in the village. In the first phase of census, name of all members of the household, family size and type, ethnic identity, early settlement, group affiliation, age and gender, educational status, occupation and income, religion, land holding size and ownership, housing structure, consumption status etc. were recorded.

Total population of the village counted in the household census was at 1034, among them 494 are Garos, 497 are Bangali Muslims, and 43 are Hajongs. Number of households in the village are 195, among them 74 are Garos, 110 are Bangali Muslims and 11 are Hajongs. Among the Garos, 255 are males and 239 are females. All Garos of the village are now Christian, and all Hajongs are Hindu.

Baseline census among Garo households has showed a changing trend in their residence choice. This observation has triggered my interest in focusing my research on the changes of their residence pattern and its implications on gender role and male and female power. With this intention I restructured my interview schedule and prepared a list of 155 Garo married couples of the village. In the second phase an in-depth study was carried out to explore kinship requirements and economic prerogatives on marriage and present choice of post-marital residence and its impact on gender relation and male and female power. In this phase of census, information was collected on demographic, social and cultural characteristics of all the couples, such as their age, educational status, occupation, duty station, village of origin, village of affiliation, residence choice of present and parental generation,

pre-marital kinship relation of husband and wife, status of parental property received after marriage, gender specialization (who does what work) and position of men and women in household decision making etc. Opinion on some aspects of traditional kinship systems such as taking of mother's surname, traditional inheritance and residence pattern etc. were also collected from Garo households. In the census, 100 Garo couples among 155 were found affiliated with the village in respect of post-marital residence. In the third phase, 25 Garo couples of Mandigaon, living in Dhaka were interviewed in order to understand their socio- economic status, present residence choice and attitude towards matrilineal kinship system.

#### **1.6.5 Case Study Method**

The Case study is an in-depth investigation. It accordingly uses different methods to collect various kinds of information and to make observations (Hamel, 1993:45). For the purpose of the present study, a total of 30 case studies were conducted during the time of fieldwork, of them 20 case studies were conducted in the village and rest in Dhaka among city dwelling couples of Mandigaon. They were selected randomly from among resident couples of the village. It included both older and younger couples as well as better-off and poor Garos. Case studies were not focused on one aspect of the problem, rather focused mainly on understanding of the social, economic and kinship considerations of change in residence pattern and implications of different resident choice on gender roles, access to male and female in social and economic resources.

### **1.6.6 Techniques of Interview**

Initially, all 74 household heads (male or female) and their spouses in each of the household were considered as respondents in the study. Among them, eight were female-heads and one was a widower. Thus, numbers of respondents stood at 139, of them 66 are males and 73 are females. Three interviewers were selected from among the educated Garos; of them, two are males and one female.

A partially open-ended interview schedule was developed for interviewing respondents. Where answers were supposed to be limited within three or four options, questions were structured with probable answers in order to get quick responses. In other cases, questions remained open-ended. Interviewers were given proper orientation about the objectives of the study and they were trained properly to take interviews without bias. Interviewers had taken face-to-face interview of the respondents. The male interviewer interviewed male respondents, and the female interviewer interviewed female respondents. I supervised the progress of work and provided interviewers necessary help and guidance. When I was not present, instruction and guidance were given to them through mobile phone. After the preliminary census, I personally went to household-to-household to check validity and reliability of the data collected by the interviewers.

Three key informants were selected from the village, two from older generation and other from younger generation. Key informants were discussed in several occasions in order to clarify confusions arising out of fieldwork and data collection process.



I have also interviewed a number of Garos and non-Garos from outside. I have discussed with the Father of the Mariamnagar Mission on different aspects of Garo life including their present religion, Christianity. I have taken interview of the President of Tribal Welfare Association, Jhenaigati, some learned Garos living in Birishiri of Netrokona and Dhaka. Besides, Government and NGO official of Jhenaigati, Sherpur and Mymensingh, and Union Parishad Chairman and members of the Nolkura Union were also discussed.

### **1.6.7 Historical Documents and Oral Histories**

Valuable information on past events were mainly collected from secondary sources such as published books, monographs, censuses, journals, articles and souvenirs published on Garo situation. It helped me to gather primary idea about historical perspective of economic and social transition of the Garos. At first various types of documents available from these sources were identified and then a list of relevant documents was prepared for the purpose of analysis.

Literature on the Garos of Bangladesh part is still not enough. Other than district gazetteers, we have only a few books and journals in hand. We have no ethnographic information about when Garos settled in Jhenaigati area, particularly in the area of the study village. To gather information about their past social, economic, religious, political and cultural life, their relation with other ethnic people, and their early settlement in the village I had to depend on oral histories and retrospective interviews. Two key informants from older generation Garos provided me with valuable information regarding past economic and social life of the Garos in the area, their early settlement,

and mass departure of Hajongs from the area and arrival of Bangali Muslims from Assam of India and other parts of Bangladesh.

### **1.6.8 Mobile Phone and Audio-Visual Method**

Mobile phone proved to be a very effective means during the study. Throughout the research period, I have maintained contact with the key informants in the village by this means. It helped me to gather desired information quickly. Thus, it helped me to save my time also.

A good number of photographs were taken on the spot to record the life-style and socio-economic ambience of the Garo villagers. Video films were also helpful in my understanding the social and cultural life of the Garos. I have collected three video films on the *Wangala* festival organized by the villagers in the past under the auspices of the Mission. It helped me to make an idea about the present status of the post-harvest festival of the Garos. I also used mini cassette recorders to document conversations with the respondents.

### **1.6.9 Strategies for Data analysis**

The study combines information both from primary and secondary sources. Historical documents are used in the analysis of past social and economic situation of the study people. Primary data related to present situation are the outcome of intensive field study in the village. In order to make a systematic analysis, findings and empirical evidences presented in the study are

classified into following categories:

1. Information related to early history and transition of the Garos (presented in Chapter-II)
2. Information related to past and ethnic situation in Sherpur district (presented in Chapter- III).
3. Empirical data related to present demographic and social characteristics of the three ethnic population in the village (presented in Chapter-IV).
4. Empirical data related to matrilineal kinship group and social organization of the Garos in the village ( presented in Chapter-V).
5. Empirical data related to present resident choice of the Garos in the village (presented in Chapter-VI).
6. External factors responsible for social change among Garos (presented in Chapter VII).
7. Conclusion (presented in Chapter-VIII).

## **1.7 Literature Review**

In the following pages, I shall try to present a brief review of the available literature on Garo affairs with special focus on the writings of their matrilineal social organizations.

Garos have drawn much more attention of outside world than any other north-eastern small ethnic communities, and writings on them began in the early nineteenth century during British colonial expansion in the subcontinent. Since then many officials and missionaries, individuals and professional anthropologists contributed to the Garo studies from their own views and perspectives. As a result, we have different types of literature on the Garos, although most of the early literatures dealt with the Garos of Indian part, particularly about the hill Garos. However, many features

described by the early writers on hill Garos can also be attributed to the plains Garos, as well as Garos of Bangladesh.

Publications on Garo affairs are of different kinds. Ellen Bal has categorized those literatures into four types: administrative, missionary, administrative-cum ethnological and professional anthropological account (Bal, 2000:23). Islam has divided those into three categories such as historical, empirical-descriptive and evaluative of change (Islam, 1986:7). But whatever may be the classification, we find difficulty in distinguishing one category from another. All early sources, intended for either administrative or missionary purpose contain good historical and ethnological accounts of the Garos of that time. During the period of British contact with the Garos and successive extension of colonial rule, the district officers of Mymensingh, Rangpur and Goalpara as well as those who commanded various expeditions into the independent villages submitted volumes of reports. After the establishment of political and military control over the ethnic areas, British rulers attempted to find best possible ways to deal with the ethnic communities. Therefore, information about the socio-economic life of them were collected and documented. Primarily information about different ethnic communities of that time was collected for facilitating administrative rule in order to control and govern them effectively. Some officials were also entrusted with the task of collecting ethnological information about unknown and peripheral people of the sub-continent. For the construction of early Garo history these British officials contributed much. Before that Garos had no written history and they were undescribed and uncatalogued. Many of them also observed ethnic communities with different objectives so that they could make contributions

to the scientific development in this regard. Various officials were worried that much valuable information would be lost forever if not recorded soon. Works of H. H. Risley<sup>3</sup> and L.A Waddell<sup>4</sup> in the field of colonial ethnology are the examples of such serious concern. "In the light of this concern, it is not surprising that colonial ethnology gained much of its importance in the 1860s and 1870s and became a scientific discipline" (Bal, 2000: 25).

In fact, in the colonial past, history and image of the Garos constructed by the westerners were outsider's view. British officials and missionaries, even some enthusiastic writers in their books, journals, monographs and reports projected them as a curious people. They explained customs, beliefs, and social organizations of the Garos in the light of their 'civilization'. They also established the very name Garo. They have successfully constructed a persistent image of a 'stereotyped' people that even today has become difficult to overrule. In search of earliest Garo history and tradition we have little clue to bank on, other than what westerners left for us since eighteen century onwards. Insiders view was a later development, and that also is of two types: writings of native Garo scholars and writings of non-Garo Indian scholars. Non-Garo Indian scholars can also be termed as 'outsider' in the

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<sup>3</sup> In 1884, the Government of Bengal recommended to the Government of India the appointment of H.H. Risley to conduct an inquiry into castes and occupations throughout Bengal. The concern was vented that "if it is not undertaken now, much of information of unsurpassed interest will be lost to the world". See, H.H. Risley, *The Tribes and Castes of Bengal. Ethnographic Glossary*, Volume I & II (Calcutta: Firma Mukhopadhyay, 1981 [first published in 1891]).iii.

<sup>4</sup> L.A. Waddell was a high official of Indian Medical Service. He conducted his personal scientific research in the face of such observation "culture is being allowed to disappear unrecorded". See L.A Waddell. "The Tribes of the Brahmaputra Valley: A Contribution on their Physical Types and Affinities," *Journal of the Asiatic Society*, Part III. 1900. Anthropology, No. 1 (1900).2-4.

Garo sense, although their approaches differ to a great extent from the colonial viewpoint. In course of time, with the development of scientific knowledge of social anthropological research, Garo and non- Garo writers of India and Bangladesh took leading role in the field of Garo studies. According to Bal:

“This process took more than one century and coincided with general developments in colonial writings on India. As developments in colonial representations of India in general clearly corresponded with representations of the Garos, it is essential to study the colonial and post-colonial approach of the subcontinent in general. Only then can we understand why Garos have been depicted in the way they have been.” (2000:24).

Since my purpose is to understand changing circumstances of the Garo community in the light of change in their social organization, more particularly changes in their residence pattern, power and gender role, I would like to avoid elaborate discussion on general literature related to them. In the following pages I shall try to present a brief overview of the available literature of British colonial period, post-British colonial period and Bangladesh period with special focus on the writings on social organization of the Garos.

### **1.7.1 British Colonial Period**

In 1788, John Eliot was deputed by the British authorities to study condition of the Garo Hills. John Eliot’s account ‘Observation on the inhabitants of the Garrow Hills, made during a publik deputation in the years 1788 and 1789’ published in the *Asiatic Researches* in 1792, was the first description of the Garos by a westerner. Since then numerous books and articles have been

published about them by the British Indian officials. Some of these earliest or classical sources are: Francis Buchanan (1807-1814), David Scott (1816-1818), C.S. Reynolds (1849), Moffat Mills (1854), E.T. Dalton (1872), and Alexander Mackenzie (1884). Besides them, John Avery (1884), Ayerst (1880), Esme (1885), Austen Godwin (1873), B.C. Allen (1905-1906) also contributed to the Garo studies in different journals and reports.

Dalton's *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal* (1872) is one of the most significant earliest sources about the ethnic communities of Bengal of that time. Bamfylde Fuller described it as a "mine of information"<sup>5</sup>. In the book, Dalton described many special features of the Garos with scholarly endeavor. Although not very comprehensive, a brief discussion of clan organization and inheritance pattern of the Garos can be found in his description. He translated the term *Mahari* as 'motherhood', which gained much importance in subsequent Garo studies. He was the first who tried to draw up a descriptive catalogue of the Bengal tribes, which proved to be a useful guide to the ethnological exhibition of that time<sup>6</sup>.

But information available about the Garos was fragmented and scattered before Major A. Playfair. In 1903, Sir Bamfylde Fuller, the then Commissioner of Assam, initiated a project to prepare a series of

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted from the introduction written by Bamfylde Fuller in Playfair's *The Garos* (1909).

<sup>6</sup> Edward Tutie Dalton was a Colonel of Bengal Staff Corps and was the Commissioner of Chutia Nagpur at the time of the publication of the book *Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal*. He spent the greater portion of his long service in Asam and Chutia Nagpur, the interesting field of ethnological research of all Bengal. He said "I have probably had more opportunities of observing various races and tribes, especially, those usually called Aborigines, than have been conceded by any other officer now in the service". See preface, ii.

monographs on important tribes and castes of Assam under a unified scheme. Playfair, the then Deputy Commissioner of Garo Hills “has been entrusted the task of describing the hill tribe known as Garos. As civil officer in charge of the district inhabited by them he has been in daily communication with the people of whom he discourses, his sympathy with them has unlocked their hearts, and the remarkably close acquaintance he possesses with their language has enabled him to profit to the full by his opportunities for inquiry”<sup>7</sup>.

His study provides most detailed, reliable and first ever-systematic ethnographic account of the Garos. His work proves to be a base-material for study of culture change among Garos (Majumder, 1978:14). Parimal Chandra Kar has written a new introduction of the first reprint of *The Garos*, published in 1975, and remarked about the significance of the book in the following words:

“Major Playfair’s monograph stands out as the earliest systematic account of the Garos and any discourse on the subject can hardly proceed without reference to the abiding stock source this treatise has proved to be.”

*The Garos* provides us a description of the general characteristics, customs, religion, language of the Garos, particularly Hill Garos. Apart from general account, Playfair discovered the curious feature of their matrilineal kinship rule and its influence on Garo life. His monograph also contains a

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<sup>7</sup> Quoted from the introduction written by Bamfylde Fuller in Playfair’s *The Garos* (1909), xxx.



description of exogamous marriage system of the Garos, which prohibits marriage within same septs and motherhoods.

After the publication of *The Garos* many books and articles have been written and published about the Garos. Missionary sources are also important in this regard. During the days of British occupation, missionaries worked among different tribes. Writings on missionary activities and achievements also provide us valuable information about the Garo situation of that time. Rev. William Carey's *A Garo Jungle Book* (1919) is a record of Church history in Assam and contains a vivid description of the Baptist missionary activities in the area. Reverend Baldwin in his book *The God and the Garos* (1934) made an attempt to preserve reliable record of the Baptist missionary activities in the Mymensingh area. He presented a description of first Baptist Garo convert. Besides this, Baldwin has written a book on Garo laws.

### **1.7. 2 Post-British Colonial Period**

British colonial rule ended in the subcontinent with the emergence of two independent countries: India and Pakistan in August 1947. But now, the subcontinent has three independent countries: Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. In this situation any kind of discussion under a broad-head like Post-British or Post-Colonial becomes problematic. It demands clarification since both 'post-British period' and 'post-independence period' in Indian context have same political meaning. Whereas for Bangladesh, post-British period has a different political meaning since it emerged as an independent country in 1971. In Bangladesh, Pakistani neo-colonial period lingered from 14 August 1947 to 15 December 1971. This makes me, for the convenience

of the general discussion on post-British colonial literature related to Garos, limit within the time frame from August 1947 to 1971. During this period, we see only a few writers from Bangladesh part, who contributed in this field. On the other, many Indian Anthropologists, both Garo and Non-Garo have contributed significantly in this area.

Early twentieth century witnessed waves of anthropological explorations of primitive and aboriginal people in Europe mainly from the writings of functionalist anthropologists like Bronislaw Malinowski (1922), Radcliffe-Brown (1922) and others. Colonial and Indian writers were also influenced with the spirit of cultural discoveries, as a result of which peripheral and more isolated ethnic communities also became researcher's subjects of curiosity. Indeed, that was the time when anthropology started gaining importance as a separate scientific discipline in the subcontinent. The process led to the emergence of a good number of native professional anthropologists, who in course of time dominated the arena of ethnic discourse.

It should be noted here that like British period, most of the researchers of this period were concerned with the hill Garos of Indian part. However, the writers who contributed in this field were mostly professional anthropologists. To mention a few names are: J.k. Bose (1934), B. Mukherjee (1955), Robbins Burling (1963), T.C. Sinha (1966), Chie Nakne (1967), Goswami and Majumder (1965,1968,1972), J.B. Battacharjee ( 1978) P.C. Kar (1978,1982) Milton Sangma (1981,1987,1992), Julius Marak (1985), D.N. Majumder (1978), Mihir. N. Sangma (1993).

Burling focused mainly on family and kinship system, language and related other factors of cultural change of the Garos. Mukherjee, Bose, Sinha, Bhattacharjee and others focused chiefly on historical perspectives and changes in social organization. Nakne made in-depth studies on Garo and Khasi social organization in relation to those of other matrilineal communities. Goswami and Majumder were concerned with the changes in their social organizations and institutions. Kar studied changes in their lives in relation to the change in economic pattern and other factors involved in their social life, while Sangma studied on the history and culture of the Garos. Marak presented a comprehensive and a critical analysis of Garo customary laws. Mihir N. Sangma worked on the issues related to origin and culture of the Garos.

Burling's *Rengsanggiri* is the first comprehensive and in-depth academic pursuit by a professional Anthropologist on family, kinship and other aspects of Garo social organization. In the 1950s Burling carried out his work in a traditional village situated in the Garo Hills, ten miles to the north of Tura. He decided to study these people because of their unique combination of kinship traits, particularly their matrilineal descent and their matrilineal cross-cousin marriage. But he did not concentrate on a single central thesis, rather he recorded everything what he observed in the village, the nature, and function of different institutions and their relationships. According to him, this book is a "descriptive study of the Garos, or more precisely, of one Garo village" as he saw between October 1954 and October 1956 (1963:5). In this book he also analyzed traditional Garo way of life with reference to economic activities, Christianity, external political control, new agricultural methods as factors of change.

D.N. Majumder's *Culture Change in two Garo Villages* (1978) is another important contribution to this field. He carried out his studies in two traditional Garo villages in the Garo Hills districts, namely *Matchakolgiri* and *Wajadagiri*. His long stay in those villages gave him opportunity to carry out intensive study and to observe cultural change among them. Keeping in mind that effects of other factors like Christianity and administrative reforms have been profound in the lives of Garos in general, his study focused on one factor only, i.e. adaptation of permanent cultivation. He observed that impact of Christianity and administrative changes are indirect on their traditional social institutions (1978:6). He wrote:

“The integration of the family and the kinship group is seriously impaired when one of its members became a Christian, goes to a school, refuses to participate in *Songsarek* festivals and refuses to go as a replacement spouse or as a cowife to *Songsarek* family. But such things have no direct bearing on their institutions. In a *Songsarek* Garo household there is not much difference between a converted member and a member who does not conform to the traditional norms” (1978: 6).

*Garo Customary Law and Practices* by Julius Marak is another significant sociological study, which presents a comprehensive and critical analysis of the Garo customary laws, traditions and practices. This book is a valuable source of information about traditional Garo way of life, their history, culture, religion, kinship and inheritance.

No significant research was done in the post-British period about the ethnic communities of Bangladesh. Census report and district gazetteers compiled during British rule were subsequently updated in the post-British period. The

government publication prepared during Pakistani rule (1947-1971), were basically reproductions of the older sources. We find a few books and articles published during the period mainly by the foreign anthropologist like Levi-Strauss (1952), Bessaignet (1964), but these studies were mainly concerned about the ethnic communities of CHT and a few about the ethnic groups of the northern borders of Bangladesh. While reviewing literature on ethnic communities Khaleque observed:

“Except for the ethnographic accounts on the ethnic communities of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) area, all other books relate mainly to the ethnic communities of Indian part of the northern and north-eastern borders of Bangladesh. People belonging to the same ethnic group also live in Bangladesh part of the border and have more or less the same basic social organization and culture as their Indian counterpart. As such, the books written on those who live in Indian territory related only to a certain extent to those who live in the present-day Bangladesh territory” (Khaleque, 1995:3-4).

### **1.7.3 Bangladesh Period**

Literature on the Garos of Bangladesh part is still inadequate. After the independence of Bangladesh, we find only a few writers who worked in this field. They are Abdus Sattar (1971,1975,1978), T.M.Kibriaul Khaleque (1983,1984,1985,1992,1995), Mahmud Shah Qureshi (1984) Zahidul Islam (1986), Ali Nawaz (1984), Robbins Burling (1997), Ellen Bal (2000). They made important contributions. Besides, Karnesh Marak (1964), Shuvash Jengcham (1988), Monindrak Marak, Rev. Richil and a few others worked on different aspects of Garo life and customary laws.

In Bangladesh we find that an amateur writer Sattar (1927--2000) played pioneering role and contributed much in the field of social Anthropology<sup>8</sup>. He wrote many books on ethnic communities, which contained a wealth of descriptive information. But since Sattar had no background in Anthropology, the contents of his books suffered from many shortcomings and he was criticized by some writers (Maloney 1984, Mey 1984, Khaleque 1995). Maloney (1984:9) remarked that Sattar referred to ethnic language as “dialects” and to their religions as “superstitious beliefs” and “irrational practices” (Sattar 1971:13, 17,135,235). Khaleque pointed out, “ethnic languages are not “dialects” of the Bangali language as Sattar thought. These are distinct languages that belong to different branches of various languages” (1995:5). Similarly Mey also has criticized Sattar for describing ethnic groups as” wild and crude” (1984: 333).

*Tribal Cultures of Bangladesh* (1984) edited by Qureshi has been regarded as a good source. It presents thirty-two essays on ethnic communities of Bangladesh. Some of the articles in this volume are written by professional anthropologists, some by students and amateur writers. It contains three articles on Garo community. Two articles written by Nawaz and Khaleque are important contributions. In his article *Garo Society in Transition*, Nawaz presented a general description of the traditional Garo society and its transition. Khaleque’s analytical article *Garo Matrilineal Cross-cousin Marriage: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Face of Social Change* reviews Garo Marriage system in the face of transition between

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<sup>8</sup> Although, he was not a trained Anthropologist, eminent Sociologist Professor A. K. Nazmul Karim praised him as the pioneer of social Anthropologist of East Pakistan (Bangladesh), see, forward *Sylvan Shadows* (1971).

'traditionality' and 'modernity'. Khaleque observed that in the process of continuation and discontinuation of culture traits, the problems regarding marriage system of the Garos become so complex that a quicker and easier solution is extremely difficult (1984:236). He suggested further research on this issue.

Islam (1986) conducted another important sociological study in a Garo community in the village *Andharupara* in Sherpur district. His study covered almost every aspects of Garo community and concluded with many observations about changes in their social organization and traditional outlook. He observed both orthogenetic and exogenous processes of change were operative in the Garo community of Bangladesh. According to him Garo community could be said to be "a community in transition" (1986: 293). He observed that although matrilineal pattern of property ownership and inheritance continued to dominate, matrilineal social organization was giving way to patrilineal social organization. He observed obvious patrilineal influences in Garo family structure of the village and a large number of households were found in favor of change to patrilineal family type.

Burling's *Strong Women of Modhupur* (1997) perhaps is the most outstanding and specialized anthropological work on Bangladeshi Garos. It is an account of author's personal experience with the Garos of Madhupur area of Bangladesh. Between 1980s and the mid 1990s Burling lived with the Mandi's of Madhupur. This book is the outcome of his long acquaintance with them. According to him this is a more personal account than he would have felt appropriate to write in the fifties as the book reports not only facts, but feelings also.

The role and status of women in the Garo community are clearly different from their Muslim and Hindu neighbors. Kinship rule and inheritance pattern descended from mother's line attributed women a better position in their community. In his book particular attention is given to their matrilineal kinship organization and to the special role that plays women in the Garo society. About kinship, Burling writes:

“It is kinship, not the village or any other territorially defined group, that provides the organizing principles by which Mandis relate to one another. People spend much of their lives working with the members of their own households, but these are embedded in a wide network of kinship, and the network is constantly evoked as people address one another and refer to one another”(1997:162).

In Madhupur, Burling observed that Christianity had little direct effect on family and kinship practices<sup>9</sup>. Changes happened in their family pattern were due more to the economic pressure than new religion. He observed that new crops and skills had implications for land tenure and the skills opened new opportunities for employment. That, in turn implied changes in inheritance, family organization and distribution of wealth (1997:188-189).

Khaleque's (1992) contribution to this field is also remarkable. He conducted an in-depth research to understand the process of land and tree tenure change among the Garo community of Madhupur Garh forest of Bangladesh. Madhupur Garh is a part of plain forests of Bangladesh and a

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<sup>9</sup> As discussed earlier, almost same view was expressed by Majumder about the impact of Christianity on the social organization of the Garos (1978:6). Khaleque also endorsed the view by saying that “Christianity could not influence the basic character of the Garo society” (1984:234).



In this book, Burling reviews the history of the Garo people of both India and Bangladesh since the British first encountered them more than two centuries ago. Besides, his book discusses outside influences and factors that are responsible for change in their society. First three chapters of the book contain historical background of the Garos. Description of the people of Madhupur starts from chapter four. It describes the changes that have come to the Garo lives and examined it in the light of traditional practice, family and kinship, gender role, inheritance, Christianity, education new technology, work and income, poverty and wealth, influence of the plains and related other factors. Chapter ten contains a description of situation of Mandi workers and students in Dhaka. A large number of Garos are living in Dhaka mainly for the purpose of employment and education. Their employment opportunity and nature of employment, income and its effects on family organization, and condition of Mandi students are examined in this chapter.

He is even more concerned with their 'cultural independence' that they are able to maintain in a more rigid way in spite of relentless pressure of socio-economic changing circumstances. Burling says.

"They (Garos) have dealt with Hindu and Muslim Bengalis for many centuries and they have dealt with Europeans for two. Political independence has been lost for more than one century and the pressure for change have been relentless, but still they remain defiantly distinct. Whether this cultural independence can be maintained for another century is by no means clear, but this book describes the way in which it has been maintained up to now" (1997:3).

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large number of Garos are living in that area since long. Based on a specific case of conflict between the government forest department and the Garo community of Madhupur Garh, the study analyzed process of land and tree tenure change in relation to change in the interactive social, economic, political, technological, demographic and environmental changes. He observed that the traditional system of communal ownership of land and tenural arrangement prevailed among the Garos of the Garo Hills did not work in Madhupur Garh. Instead, the concept of individual household ownership was developed (1992:241). Ownership of land and other property also was noticed in a process of change from matrilineal to patrilineal. Although the ideal principle of inheritance of property was followed in some case, men's ownership and inheritance was also practiced (1992:242). On the other hand, matrilineal social organization of the Garos of Madhupur Garh area was similar to their counterpart in the Garo Hills of India (1992:152), and the basic principles related to women's role and status were maintained by them. Women played a major role in family decision-making. Husband-wife relations among them were typically characterized by mutual cooperation and not by dominion (1992:244). In different other articles he has discussed and examined different aspects of their marriage and kinship-group and terminology. He observed that many kinship terminologies like 'clan', 'motherhood', 'moiety' and 'lineage' were not exactly equivalent to local Garo terminology (1985:83).

A recent publication, Ellen Bal's *'They ask if we eat frogs': Social Boundaries, Ethnic Categorisation, and the Garo People of Bangladesh* is an another important anthropological work in this field. Her study deals mainly with social categories in the light of history, religion, contemporary

tribalist discourse and present socio-economic political setting of the Garos in Bangladesh. Her work also contributes to our understanding of the complex relation between South Asia minorities and their neighbors, of their self-perceptions and their presentation to the outside world, and of their place in the modern state.

Garos are divided into different groups and this difference is marked mainly by their language. But in many cases, they share same *ma'chong* name. They refer to *ma'chong* members, whether from own group or others, as relatives and maintain relationship with them. They have the same kinship system while carefully maintaining social boundaries. Bal wonders, "how it is possible that different *dol* (group) have the same kinship system while carefully maintaining their social (*dol*) boundaries". To understand this complex situation she has suggested further research (2000:96).

*Bangladeser Garo Sampradaya* written by Jengcham (1994) is also a good ethnographic account. Jengcham is a Garo writer, and the book is based on author's observation of his own society and culture. Among other Garo writers, articles written by Monindranath Marak and Reverend Richil of Bangladesh also have valuable information.

In the recent years a trend of self-consciousness and concern about protecting traditional culture are observed among the Garos. As a result, many educated Garos have taken pen to uphold their cause. Manifestation of this trend can be seen in the publication of many books and articles. Although most of the writings of this nature are emotion driven and lack anthological flavor, yet, these writings help us to understand present Garo mind in a changing circumstance.

## **1.8 Organization of the Dissertation**

For the purpose of a systematic presentation, the dissertation is planned into eight chapters. Chapter-I is the introductory chapter; it includes problem, rationale, and objectives of the study. It also deals with different methods used during the research and provides a review on available literature related to Garo affairs. Chapter-II presents a brief historical outline of the Garos with a transitional profile of their social organization. Chapter-III introduces the study area and outlines its past and present ethnic situation. Chapter-IV presents a comparative analysis of demographic, social and economic characteristics of three ethnic populations living in the study village. Chapter-V exclusively deals with the Garos of the study village and focuses on several aspects of their present socio-economic condition, kinship and social organization. Information presented here is the outcome of an in-depth study conducted by the author during fieldwork. Research findings on different residence choice and its implications on gender roles and power among Garos are discussed and analyzed in Chapter-VI. Chapter-VII discussed several factors responsible for social, economic and cultural change in Garo society. Conclusion has been drawn up in the last chapter.

## Chapter: II

### A Short Background of the Garos of Bangladesh

*For the purpose of outlining key characteristics of the study people this chapter presents a general overview of the Garos with transitional profile of their social organizations. It contains an account of the Garos, which includes distribution of their population, historical analysis of migration and early settlement, origin of the term "Garo", geographical division and cultural difference between Hill Garo and Plains Garo, religion and Christianity. It also discusses changing circumstances of their matrilineal social organizations, such as origin of matrilineality, clan groups and sub-groups, kinship and marriage, inheritance, and related other issues like post-marital residence pattern, status of women and men etc.. Historical and ethnographic information presented here are collected from secondary sources (published and unpublished books and documents). Observation method is also used in this regard.*

#### 2.1. General Overview

The Garos are a distinct ethnic community, more known to the outside world for their matrilineal social organization, especially kinship system. Their present population around the world is approximately half a million. Most of them live in the northeast India, mainly in the Garo Hills region. Garo Hills located in the western part of the Indian state of Meghalaya and western portion of the Shillong plateau that divides Assam from Bengal (Burling, 1997:6). In India their habitat also extends to the adjoining areas of Khasi Hills, Assam, Nagaland, Tripura and West Bengal. In Assam Garos are located in a few districts of Brahmaputra valley including Karbi Anglong district. But their major concentration is in the southern fringe of the district of Goalpara and Kamrup. In Nagaland, some Garos live in Chumkudina area

of Kohima District. In Tripura they settled down in the South Tripura, while in West Bengal they settled in the district of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar.

About one-fifth of the total Garo population lives in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh most of the Garos are concentrated in the bordering areas of Mymensingh, Sherpur, and Jamalpur and Netrokona district. In Mymensingh, they are located in Bhaluka, Phulbaria, Muktagacha, Phulpur, Haluaghat, and Dhobaura. In Sherpur, they live in all upazilas (sub-district): Jhenaigati, Sribordi, Nalitabari, Nokla and Sherpur Sadar. In Netrokona, they are found in Durgapur, Kalmakanda, and Purbodhala. A large number of them live in Madhupur forest areas of present Tangail district. Few Garos also live in Sreepur upazila of Gazipur District. About 5000 Garos are now living in Dhaka, mainly for the purpose of service and education. About one thousand Garos are living in Chittagong, the second largest city of Bangladesh, for the same purpose. Some Garos are also found living in the districts of Sylhet, Moulvibazaar and Sunamganj.

The Garos are short-statured, long-headed people and have a broader facial profile showing a broad nose form (Singh, 1994:282). Buchanan Hamilton (1807) describes Garos as short, stout-limbed active people, with strongly marked Chinese countenances, as is the case with the entire aboriginal from Brahmaputra to Cape Negeris. "Their faces are round and short. The forehead is not receding but projects very little beyond the eye, which is small, on a level with the face, very dark and obliquely set. The want of prominence in the nose is remarkable" (Dalton, 1872: 73). Playfair remarks, "in complexion Garos are not very dark, though they are considerably more so than their neighbours the Khasis, and they possess the Mongolian type of feature in a more marked degree" (Playfair, 1909:2). Southeast Asia also

have witnessed wave of many nations belonging to different races. Long centuries of contact among them have brought considerable changes in the appearance of the people of the region. Although, in case of Garos, this has happened in a slow pace because of their apparently rigid kinship rules, we find a certain amount of mixture between Garos and the plains people.

Their mother tongue is Garo, which belongs to the Bodo group of Tibeto-Burman stock. The Bodo languages are mostly spoken in the north-east India, some close to the northern and eastern boarder of Bangladesh. Of them Garo, Kak Borak, Kucchari are spoken primarily in the hill areas (Burling, 1997:6). "Their language still retains some similarity with Tibetan: and some of their ideas, such as sentimental value they attach to gongs, are identical with those prevailing Tibetan villages"<sup>10</sup>. Bangladeshi Garos are now bilingual; they speak both Garo Language (Abeng) and Bangla. Over the course of many centuries, as the Bangali and Assamese languages have expanded, the area occupied by the Bodo speakers has probably shrunk (Ibid: 9). In Bangladesh nearly 130 million people speak in Bangla. Influence of Bangla is evident in the day-to-day affairs of the Garos. Bangla words have penetrated to all dialects of Garos, and they use thousands of them. Without these borrowed words Mandis would find it impossible to talk about some topics. Burling observes:

"Mandi speakers feel free to use thousands of Bengali words, and they easily embed them in Mandi sentences. Mandis cannot really speak their own language without the help of Bengali words" (1997:221).

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted from introductory note written by Bampfylde Fuller in Playfairs *The Garos*, 1909).



All early ethnographic, administrative and missionary accounts described Garos with many adjectives, such as brave, sturdy, primitive, uncivilized, truculent, rude, obstinate, savage and barbarous. Carey said that the people themselves were regarded as the most uncouth and barbarous of border tribes (1919:2). They were negatively projected because, in the early days there existed a cruel practice of head hunting among them. Eliot left the first description of Garos by a westerner and he was the first to mention head hunting (Eliot: 1792). The plain around the hills were their hunting grounds, they required human head and skulls for the funeral rites and ceremony, to be burnt with the crops. In most cases, the people of the plains were the victim of this brutal practice. According to Playfair:

“Less than half a century ago, the Garos were looked upon as cruel and blood-thirsty savages, who inhabited a tract of hills covered with almost impenetrable jungle... The Garos were notorious as the perpetrators of numerous raids into the plains at the foot of their hills in the districts of Goalpara and Mymensingh. On each occasion a number of defenseless *ryots* were killed... Besides raiding a common foe in the plains, the Garos were also addicted to internal warfare, and that many blood feuds existed between individuals and villages” (1909: 76-77).

In 1866, Garrowana was constituted as a separate administrative unit and Lieutenant W.J. Williamson set up the present head quarter of Tura in 1867, in the heart of the hills. He was the first Deputy Commissioner of the Garo hills, who established control over the area. Within a short span of time he quieted them and turned them into a peaceful and law-abiding subject (Playfair, 1909:77). Along with some other customs and superstitious beliefs the bloody practice of head hunting was stopped and eventually disappeared.

However, many good points among them also attracted attention of the early writers. Dalton finds following good points in their character:

“They are lively, good natured, hospitable, frank and honest in their dealings, till contaminated by their intercourse with Bengalis, and they possess that pearl of great price so rare amongst Eastern nations--a love of truth. They will not hastily make engagements, because when they do make them, they intend to keep them. They are affectionate fathers and kind husbands, and their conduct generally towards the weaker sex is marked by consideration and respect. Notwithstanding the lavish exposure of their persons the women are chaste and make good steady wives” (Dalton, 1872:75).

Reverend T. J. Keith, of the American Baptist Mission praised their magnificent physics in this way:

“I can truly say that I have never seen finer specimens of the physical man that I saw in the interior of the Garo Hills” (Baldwin, 1934:16).

Baldwin endorsed this statement as applicable to many Garos living along even the foothills of Garo land. He said:

“For living in a land “of jungle covered crags and deadly climate, standing out obstinate and defiant, a secret lair and inaccessible fortress of ruthless and deadly foes,” where day by day they are faced by great hardships and by night confronted by dangerous animals, the Garos have become a sturdy and courageous people” (Baldwin, 1934:16).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Baldwin one evening was confronted by a man who had walked 52 miles to see him. The next day the same man walked another 35 miles (Baldwin 1934: 15-16).

Traditionally Garos are Agriculturists. According to Playfair:

“The Garo is essentially an agriculturist. Cultivating the soil is with him the beginning and the end of his life’s work, and the occupation to which he devotes all the energy he possesses” (1909:33).

Even today main occupation of the Garos is agriculture. A majority of hill Garos subsists on shifting cultivation. Plains-dwelling Garos follow wet cultivation like their neighbors. Women play a significant role in agricultural production and do most of the household works.

Traditionally Garos have many ceremonies and festivals of which *Wangala* is the greatest. It is the main religious festival of the *Sangsarek* Garos. It is also known as agricultural festival as it was originated from *jhum* cultivation. They usually celebrate it after the monsoon and before winter season, when the harvest was complete. After the advent of Christianity the *Wangala* lost its significance along with other traditional *Sangsarek* rites and festivals of religious and social nature.

## **2.2 Migration and Early Settlement**

We have little information about origin of the Garos. Indeed, their early history is obscure, and we have no genuine historical evidences in hand to draw their origin and migration. Until today since late nineteenth century, many attempts have been made to gather information about their early history, mainly derived from the examination of oral tradition. They have no written language. We are to depend on memory, for the preservation of the traditional myths and stories passed through generations. These have also changed according to the circumstances and in course of time many versions

and explanations of the same story have emerged making whole discourse complex and controversial. Playfair was the first European writer, who has made an organized effort to trace their origin. While doing so, he has stressed upon the importance of stories and verses in this respect. However, he has conceded that traditional verses to some extent were archaic and difficult to understand. According to Playfair:

“The story of the migration has been told in verse as well as in prose, but in the former there is so much allegory and poetic licenses, and the language is so archaic, that it is most difficult to understand. Further, the names have been changed, and the circumstances of the tale also, and the only impression of any value which we can glean from the mass of detail, is that of a general movement of a people from beyond the Himalayas into the plains to the south of them” (1909:11-12).

Garos were unknown to the outside world before British colonial rule. Even at the initial stage of the British occupation they were known as a people without history. During his endeavor to draw up a descriptive catalogue of the aboriginal people of Bengal in the late nineteenth century, Dalton was also dubious about their early history. According to him:

“The Garos have no tradition regarding migrations; they imagine themselves to be autochthonous, and the only people with whom they claim alliance are the Buts and the English” (Dalton, 1872:65).

Playfair was critical on Dalton’s opinion that Garos have no tradition of migration. According to him

“In this respect Col. Dalton appears to have been misinformed. It is probably only a legend, but there does exist among the Garos a very

distinct story of their migration from Thibet; of their arrival in the plains at the foot of the Himalayas; of their wanderings eastward up the Brahmaputra valley, and of the subsequent retracing of their steps until they came to the plains which lie between that river and the hills they now inhabit. Here they seem to have settled for a time before making the last move into the mountainous country that now forms the home of the tribe” (Playfair, 1909:8).

In spite of the fact that no detailed account can be traced on the subject of their migration, there is however an agreement on the point that they came from Tibet. It is also believed that Tibet is not their original home. Some writer’s have stressed upon their migration from ancient China, which in course of time have become the part of Mongolia or Tibet. It is said that in the southwestern region of China there are many aboriginal tribes who are non-Chinese in origin, and who speaks languages entirely different from Mandarin tongue (Baldwin, 1934:13-14). Among those tribes, the people of Keh-Deo tribe have striking resemblances with the Garos in religious belief and practice, physical features, custom, nature, hair–dress and even costume. The very word ‘Deo’ appears as a name of Garo tribe, and is applied to certain localities in Garo land by the Garos themselves. Baldwin further suggests:

“It is not incredible that the Keh-Deo tribe represents one terminal, and the Garos the other, of a race whose cradle lay, “between the upper waters of Yang–tsi-kiang and Ho-ang-ho”<sup>12</sup> rivers in north- west China, but which migrated to a more hospitable climate and friendly soil; for this wave of migration might easily have been broken eastward and westward, in its impact with the rock-like “ferocious and war-like tribes” then inhabiting the hills of Eastern Assam and Upper Burma”(Baldwin, 1934:14).

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<sup>12</sup> The Imperial Gazetteer of India Vol. XII (1908) p.175

Milton S. Sangma in his book *History and Culture of the Garos* expresses almost same view. He writes:

“They are a section of the Tibeto-Burman race of the Tibeto-Chinese family, where cradle is said to have been the north-western China between the upper waters of Yang-tse-kiang and Ho-ang-ho. The Tibeto-Burman sent forth successive waves of emigrants who spread down the valley of the Barhmaputra and the great rivers, such as Chindwin, the Irrawady and the Mekong, that flow towards the south” (Sangma, 1981:23).

Ali Nawaz finds resemblances of the Garos with another tribe of ancient China. According to him:

“There is a Han dynasty in China consisting of a very large population. It is interesting to note that there is a group in the Garo tribe named ‘Hanas’. Many common words and lores are still found in Garo and Chinese languages with or without variations. Some of the Garo customs were prevalent in ancient Chinese society” (Nawaz, 1984: 209-210).

These suggestions are not conclusive proof, as we have no historical evidences to support them. However, from these opinions we can assume that Garos might have migrated from some places of ancient China in course of time for various reasons, and later had settled down in Tibet, where they probably stayed for a longer period before they moved for a settlement in the Indian subcontinent. Garos belong to the great Mongoloid race, predominant in the whole region of Central Asia, northeast Asia and east-south Asia. In addition to their physical features, Tibeto-Chinese connection is also supported by language and many other cultural traits.

After a careful scrutiny of various views expressed we can understand that their migration from original place and from subsequent areas to the present areas of geographical distribution took many centuries. It is also probable that in their voyage for searching a suitable land for settlement, they spreaded and moved from place to place. In this process they had to cross in accessible terrain of dense forests, hills and mountains and rivers like mighty Bramaputra. It can be assumed that during their Odysseus journey they might have faced internal feuds, hostility of other tribes and kings. Being driven away from one place they moved to numerous other places. It was in the course of this journey that they settled in different areas of India and Bangladesh.

It is also difficult to ascertain the time and period when Garos first entered in this sub-continent. There are many views expressed in this regard also, but commonly accepted idea is that they migrated from Tibet in different groups from different directions at different times. Jobang D. Marak, Julius Marak (1985), Milton S. Sangma (1981), D. S. Rongmuthu (1960), Mihir N. Sangma (1993), Shuvas Jengcham ( 1994), Manindra Marak (2001) and a few other Garo writers attempted to trace and explain their origin and migration towards the sub-continent mainly on the examination of popular legends, verses and stories.

Mihir. N. Sangma in his book *Unpublished Documents on Garo Affairs* elaborately the discussed issue of migration and divided Garos into following three groups:

1. A group of Garos migrated from Tibet along the source of river Torsa or Tista towards south-western side of Tibet under the great leadership of Jappa Jalimpa and Sukpa Bonggipa.
2. Another group of the Garos who started off from Central Tibet towards South along the source of the river Brahmaputra under the leadership of Auk Raja, Asilik Gitel, Durka, Buia and Renegwa etc.
3. A group of Garos who moved towards South-Eastern part of the Tibet along the source of Chindwin, Salwin and Irrawady rivers under the able leadership of raja Sriramp, Kotta Nangrepa and Muga Dingchepa.(1993:7.)

According to his description first group of Garos started off from the valley of Tsangpo and Nayancho rivers on the western part of Tibet. They came along the source of river Torsa or Tista in between the land of Sikkim and Bhutan, subsequently they occupied Cooch Behar, and spreaded over Dubri under Goalpara and Rangamati at Rangpur and some other places of Goalpara and Kamrup. This group occupied the areas of present Habraghat Pergannah and established the first Garo Kingdom during the time of Abrasen and distributed over Goalpara and North-eastern Garo Hills. They are known as *A'wes* and *Chisaks*.

Another group moved along the right and left bank of river Brahmaputra. Some of them remained in the valley; other crossed the river near Gauhati. They were separated in groups, and one group reached eastern side of Garo Hills district. They occupied Mongri Hills, and later on moved to Nokrek hills and then occupied the area of Central Garo Hills. These Garo people are known as *Abengs*, *Matabengs* and *Matchis*. Another group of them covered all western part of the Garo Hills. They are known as *A'bengs*, *Matabengs*, *Matjangchis*, and *Kutchus*.



Third Group of Garos came first from Tibet along the source of Chindwin and Salwan rivers and entered into Burma. They occupied the place known Mandalay on the bank of the Irrawady river. They met Kucchari kings at Dimapur and fought against them. They crossed high mountains of Burma and Nagaland and then were divided into two groups: one group proceeded to southwestern Assam. Another group proceeded to southeastern side along the river Barak through Sylhet and entered Eastern Bengal. Mihir N. Sangma said:

“Later on, they were separated and gradually a group of Garos started off towards the middle part of Assam and first settled down at Gongadol and Sibdol areas. The other group of Garos moved towards south along the source of Surma or Barak river through Cachar and Sylhet districts. The Garos entered into Bengal (Present Bangladesh) and first settled their kingdom at ‘Gaur’ in Maldah district under the able leadership of Sangka. According to the legend, the Garos settled there for many years” (1993:15).

Garo Chief Shusang established his kingdom at Shusang Durgapur. Another Garo Chief named Monsing established kingdom at Monsing, now called Mymensingh. They also occupied Bawal in Dhaka. A small group of Garo warrior started their journey along the bank of Simsung or Someswari river and thus reached the foothills of southern Garo Hills. Finally they entered the hills through ragged regions and started off northeastern side of Garo Hills and gradually spreaded over different parts of the district. They are known as *Gara-Ganching, Attongs, Chibok, Rugas and Duals*. Mihir N.

Sangma states:

“The Garos in Bengal (present Bangladesh) gradually spread out and most of them moved towards bordering hill sides (present Garo Hills). They occupied many places here and there under Mymensingh and Rungpore<sup>13</sup> districts. According to the legend, one Garo chief, Monsing, first established his kingdom and the name of his kingdom was called in his own name. So, the name Mymensingh is the only derivation and merely corrupted name of Garo Chief “Monsingh”<sup>14</sup>. Even today, there are many Garos widely spread over six Thanas of *Sherpore, Nalitabari, Haluaghat, Shusang Durgapore, Kulmakanda and Sribordi* in present Bangladesh.<sup>15</sup> Susung was another Garo Chief who also first set up his kingdom and thus ruled over the vast area for many years. The capital, which he first established was also known as “Shusang” (1993:16).

There are differences of opinion on the point who first entered Bengal. Some writers opine that they belong to the same branches of the same group of the Garo ancestors who first entered into Garo Hills towards northern parts of the district. According to others they were a separate section that migrated from Tibet, through Burma, Nagaland, Cachar and Sylhet district. Mihir N

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<sup>13</sup> There is no Garo population in the present Rangpur district as the part inhabited by the Garos of the then Rangpur, namely Goalpara, was eventually placed under the jurisdiction of Assam in 1822 by the British rulers while annexation of the Garo Hills (situated at the eastern periphery of Mymensingh District) to Assam took place in 1974 (Nawaz, 1984:210).

<sup>14</sup> According to F. A. Sachse Mymensingh took its name from the Mymenshahi *Pargana* (Revenue district), which at the time of Akbar, was in the possession of Mominshah, one of the lieutenants of Nusrat Shah, son of Hossain Shah, Sultan of Bengal. The *Pargana* was therefore, named after him. Many people of the district call it Nasirabad. It is difficult to say when the district lost its original name Momenshahi. *Bengal District Gazetteer, Mymensingh* (Cal.1917:1)

<sup>15</sup> Greater Mymensingh District of Bangladesh has been divided into 5 districts at present, namely Mymensingh, Tangail, Kishoreganj, Jamapur, Netrokona, and Sherpur. Former Nalitabari and Sreebardi Thana fall under Sherpur district. Former Nalitabari now reorganized as two separate administrative units, namely Nalitabari Upazila and Jhenaigati upazila. A good number of Garos are also living in Bakshiganj upazila of Jamalpur. Shusang Durgapur (now Durgapur) and Kalmakanda are now under Netrokona district.

Sangma stresses upon the point that the Garos first occupied separately the plains of Assam to the north and also the plains of Bengal to the south of Garo Hills almost during the same periods side by side (ibid: 18).

His description indicates that Garos living in the plains of Bangladesh are not necessarily the descendents of the Garo migrants of Garo Hills, although this is a popular idea. According to Baldwin "... the Garos dwelling on Mymensingh plains were formerly dwellers among the hills" (1934:14). Same view has been expressed in the District Gazetteer of Mymensingh, "The Garos of the Mymensingh are the descendent of the Garo migrants of the Garo Hills" (1978:57). However, different records revealed that many Garo kingdoms were established in the bordering areas of Netrkona, and Sherpur of greater Mymensingh region long before they occupied and settled in the Garo Hills. Furthermore, from the references of early administrative and ethnographic accounts we came to know that Garo Hills had a few inhabitants, even after they settled down in Goalpara and Mymensingh area. Dalton observed:

"There territory lies between the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> degrees of northern latitude. To the north and west, they have the *pergannahs* of Habra-ghat, Mechpara, Kalumalupara, and Karbari, all of the district of Gowalpara lying between them and the Brahmaputra, to the south, Sherpur and Susung of the Maimenshing District, and to the east, the Kasia Hills.

A great portion of the interior is quite unexplored. It is said to contain lofty mountains with great masses of naked rock and large spaces destitute of vegetation. My own observations lead me to suppose that these mountains have few inhabitants...The highest of these mountains that was ever visited by a European, that called Tura, estimated at 4000 feet, the skirts and valleys of which are cultivated by the Garos of Witurgire, has

no vestige of human habitations on its south-western slopes, and its other faces are said to be equally destitute of inhabitants (Dalton, 1872:65).

According to Julias Marak:

“Garos before their occupation of the present Garo Hills district (A’chik A’song) settled down in the plain districts of Mymensingh, Sylhet, Goalpara and Kamrup districts. Later some of these Garos migrated to the Hills (A’chik). These groups of people who went to settle down in the Hills were called by the remnants A’chik meaning the people who settled down in the hills” (1985:10).

At present Garos constitute less than one tenth of one percent of the population of Bangladesh. It is said that number of Garo population was much larger before. In course of time, because of different reasons, many of them left Bangladesh. After the partition of the subcontinent a few Garos left from the then East Pakistan (present Bangladesh) to India. A general exodus was happened during the communal violence of 1964. A large number of Bangali Muslim refugees arrived in northern Mymensingh from Assam followed by other poor and landless Bangalis from different places like Gafargaon, Kishoreganj, Trisal, and Nandail etc. Hajongs, Baniyas, Dalus were the worst victims of the kind of violence happened that time. Garos were living side by side with them, mainly with Hajongs in many villages. Although Garos did not suffer like them, influx and intimidation of refugees frightened them and a large number of Garos from the boarder areas fled to India. Another exodus happened during the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971. Many Garos actively took part in the liberation war; there were many valiant freedoms fighters among the Garos. Like neighboring Bangalis they too suffered from Pakistani massacre and many of them took refuge to Garo

Hills and other parts of India. After the liberation many of them returned, and some of them remained in India. Nawaz observed some other reasons responsible for their exodus:

“During the last few years, many Garos left Bangladesh. Deforestation on Bangladesh side is largely responsible for this exodus. For this reason there is no Garo in Bhaluka<sup>16</sup> of the Mymensingh District at present. Forest is the part and parcel of the Garo way life. Probably the establishment of Meghalaya autonomous state in India with the Garo Hills District also intrigued them to leave for Meghalaya. During the last liberation war of Bangladesh, the Garo in large number, having been disturbed by Pakistan Army, took resort in Meghalaya, and many of them did not come back”(1984:213).

Apart from above discussion, considering distribution of Garo population in the Mymensingh border and plain areas of some other districts of Bangladesh, it seems the idea that Bangladeshi Garos are the descendent of Garo migrants from the Garo Hills has little footing. But Garos living in Bangladesh seems to have psychological attachment with the people of Garo Hills and many believe that Garo Hills is their real homeland.

### **2.3 Origin and Meaning of the Term “Garo”**

There are many explanations about the origin and meaning of the term “Garo”. But there is an agreement on the point that this was attributed on them by outsiders. All earlier ethnographic reports refer them as Garos and it

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<sup>16</sup> Few Garos are found living in Bhaluka of the present Mymensingh district. Survey conducted by SEHD in 2000 counted them at 892 of 162 households. See *Discrepancies in Census and Socio-Economic Status of Ethnic communities: A survey of ethnic communities in five thanas (sub- Districts) in the Northen, North-eastern and North-central regions of Bangladesh* (SEHD: 2000).

has become now a geographical and political term. Garos of Bangladesh are not happy with the word; rather, they prefer to use the name “Mandi” for them. Burling states:

“Indeed the official name of their district in India was the “Garo Hills” and everyone continues to use that geographical and political term. ... the people I have come to know more recently in Bangladesh, however, no longer like to be called “Garos”. This is the outsider’s word, not their own, and since their experience with outsiders has some times been unhappy, the outsider’s word has come to be resented (Burling, 1997:3).

Mihir N. Sangma suggests that there is no word as Garo in the Garo language, they never use the term among themselves, neither do the word has any meaning in their language, nor there is any root Garo word from which this word could be originated and derived. As such, it is a foreign language to them (1993:2).

John Eliot was the first European who travelled among the Garos during 1788-1789. In his report he referred to the people as “Garrows”:

“ The Garrows are called by the villagers , and upper hill people, *Council Garrows*; though the themselves, if you ask them of what cast they are, will answer, *Garrows*, and not to give themselves any appellation of cast; though there are many casts of Garrows, but of what difference I had not time to ascertain (Eliot, quoted by Bal, 2000:74).

During the year 1807-1814 Hamilton (formerly Buchanan) carried out an extensive survey in the provinces of Bengal and Rangpur and northern part of Garo Hills. He was informed by six Garo informants that the name Garo

was given to them by the Bangalis. He wrote:

“My informants say that, Garo is a Bangalese word, nor do they seem to have any general word to express their nation, each of the tribes, into which it is divided, has a name peculiar to itself”(Bal, 2000: 75).

Dalton’s description supports Hamilton observation. According to him “Garo” like “Naga” is a term applied to this people by the Hindus, they consider themselves as forming three or four nationalities with different names (Dalton, 1872: 9). Playfair suggests that Garo is merely a corruption of the name of one of the sub-division of the tribe. He observes:

“In the southern portion of the hills there exists a division of tribe who call themselves Gara or Gara-Ganching. These people are not far removed from Mymensingh district, from which direction the Garos were first approached by Europeans or Bengalis. It is therefore not unlikely that this division of the tribe first received their appellation of Gara, that the name was extended to all inhabitants of the hills, and that in time it became corrupted from “Gara” to “Garo””(Playfair, 1909:7).

Julius Marak contradicts with Playfair’s conjecture that the word Garo might be a corruption of *Gara or Ganching*. According to him the *Gara or Ganching* division of the tribe occupies a small portion of the south of the Garo Hills district. The name *Gara or Ganching* is a dialectical group of the Garo tribe, whereas, the Garos, were already there in the districts of Mymensingh and Cooch Bihar (Marak, 1985:7). He finds some truth in the theory that Garo was a corrupt form of the word *Garu or Garudas* or

*Garuda*. He explains:

“When the Garos migrated from Tibet they were known as Garu Mandai. When they settled down in India during the Vedic period they began to be called as ‘Kiratas’. Later, the Garos came to be known as Garudas during the age of Ramayana and Garuda in the Mahavarata period. The British writers called them ‘Garrow’ for Garo. Thus, in course of time Garu became Garo”(Marak, 1985:8-9).

However, he suggests for further research, as these evidences are not sufficient. Mihir N. Sangma discusses different views and presumes that Garo is a corruption of the name of the gigantic bird name *Garrurh*. It is said in a traditional song that before human settlement Garo Hills was a dense forest and was full with wild animals. That was the time when gigantic kites coming down from the high hills to the plains of Bengal used to take off domestic animals, sometimes even small children as their prey. These kites were known as *Garruh* or *Garuda* as the name of the carrier-bird of Lord Krishna. The plains people also knew the hill after the name of the bird as *Garrurh Pahar*. The people of *Garrurh Pahar* were known as *Garrurh*. The name later on has changed as Garrows and now as Garos.

Above discussion indicates the existence of different versions and controversies over the meaning and origin of the word Garo. It also flares up some controversies regarding the use of the term Garo by themselves. Garos have never accepted the word as their own. Moreover, “Garo” has long been considered a derogatory term by the people concerned (Bal, 2000:72). Yet, people irrespective of *A'chik* or *Mandi* association use the term frequently in books and materials. Indeed, absence of a single word instead of Garo has created terminological dilemma for many, and “until a single word emerges



that can take the place of “Garo”, there is no escape from the terminological dilemma” (Burling, 1997: 4). For this reason many finds it convenient to use Garo instead of any other term to describe larger group of Garo people living both in Bangladesh and India. Burling sees it as compromise to escape from terminological dilemma (ibid: 4).

Garos have no alternative word other than the “Garo” by which they can distinguish them as the same people living around the globe. In the present discourse nor *A'chik* neither *Mandi* represents all groups and sub-groups of hills-dwelling and plains-dwelling Garos. According to Burling:

“In Bangladesh the people know the word “Garo” very well, but the word they use for themselves is “Mandi”, a word that, like so many other ethnic terms that are used around the world, means, most literally, just “human being”. It is now tempting to use “Mandi” wherever I once would have used “Garo”, but unfortunately the pronunciation “Mandi” is largely restricted to the dialects spoken in Bangladesh. The people who live further north more often pronounce the word as “Mande”, so it would be artificial to refer to the entire group as “Mandi”. The northerners, moreover, more often refer to themselves as “A'chick” which means “hill person”, a term that is hardly appropriate for people who live in a country that is as uniformly low and flat as Bangladesh. This means that there is no single term that all the people who have been known as “Garos” use for themselves. The difficulty of finding a single appropriate term might suggest that the very idea of a single “Garo” ethnic group is wrong, but people recognize their own relationship well enough. The boundaries of the group that has been called “Garo” are generally clear, but it is an inconvenience that there is no fully satisfactory term that refers to them all” (Burling, 1997:3-4).

## 2.4 Hill Garo and Plains Garo

Garos are widely known as hill people to the outside world, although they may roughly be divided as hill Garo and Plains or lowland Garo. Chaudhuri<sup>17</sup> mentioned about two types of Garos: *Abori* and *Lamdani*<sup>18</sup>. According to him Garos who lived in the upper hills were *abori*, and Garos who lived in small hills or plain areas were known as *lamdani* Garos (Chaudhuri, 1872:94).

According to Chaudhuri *abori* (hill) Garos of Sherpur were different from *lamdani* (plain) Garos in many respects. They were more cruel and primitive. They hated *lamdani* Garos. They spoke in a language, which was difficult to understand, and conversation with them needed interpreter. On the other hand contact with the plains people resulted many changes in the behavior and clothing pattern of the *lamdanis*. Some of them became civilized compared to others, and they could speak a little Bangla also (1872: 94-95).

Playfair also divided them into two categories as hill Garos and plains Garos (1909:4). He wrote:

“I have the Hill Garos in mind, for those who inhabit the plains belong to a different category, and have lost many of their characteristics” (1909: preface).

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<sup>17</sup> Hara Chandra Chaudhuri was the *Zaminder* of Sherpur. His Book *Sherpur Bivaran or An Account of the Sherpur Pargana, District Maymansing*, published in 1872, has been regarded as the earliest historical source on Sherpur written by a local scholar.

<sup>18</sup> Garos living in the plain areas of Bangladesh also call them *Lamdani* Garo, which means plain people.

Indeed, geographical distribution of the past and present Garo population clearly separates them into two social and geographical boundaries: Garos living in the Garo Hills and Garos living in the adjoining or far away plains of Bangladesh and India. Garos living in Bangladesh are known as lowland Garos and greater Mymensingh area holds the largest number of lowland Garos (Burling, 1997:11). There are differences between the two categories of the Garos in a marked degree in respect of history, language, mode of agriculture, culture and experiences. Bal observes:

“These lowland Garos have their own historie(s). An international border has separated them from hill Garos since 1947. The partition resulted in a much stricter division than ever before. Although trans-boundary mobility has never stopped, Indian and Bangladeshi Garos are increasingly developing in different directions. Nevertheless, differences between these Garos have existed much longer. Lowland Garos have long been in contact with Bengali culture; the natural environment (and climate) of the plains require different agricultural methods and a different style of living; the political status of the two regions also differed long before partition” (Bal, 2000:12).

Traditionally Garos are *jhum* cultivators, which means burn and slash agriculture. However, plains Garos are not accustomed to this mode of agricultural production. Rather they used to plough cultivation and grow wet rice in their fields. Almost a century back Playfair observed:

“The nature of the soil they cultivate entirely precludes the use of the plough by the hill Garos, but those who inhabit the plains have long been accustomed to the same form of cultivation as their neighbours the Bengalis and Assamese (1909:35).

In Bangladesh Garos use the name *Mandi* and Indian Garos refer themselves as *A'chik*. Garo of further north in India also call them *Mandei* or *Mande*. So, it is difficult to make artificial boundaries about who call themselves *A'chik* or *Mande* or *Mandi*. Julius Marak observed:

“The word *A'chik* is actually used for the hills but the Garos living in the hill regions are known as the *A'chik*. The Garos who settled in the plains also call themselves *A'chik* merely to identify themselves with those living in the hill regions. The Garos living in other parts of India, also call themselves *A'chik*. This can be testified from the fact that even today, some of the Garos settled in the plain districts of Assam, Meghalaya and Bangladesh, use the word *Mande* while some use *A'chik* (Marak 1985:10).

He suggested that earlier the word *A'chik* did not exist. They were called either *Garu* or *Kiratas* or *Gruds* or *Garuda*. Today the old words have died out and instead, the word *A'chik* or *Mande* is used (Marak 1985:9). In his book *Garo Customary Laws and Practices* he has discussed different legends and theories regarding origin and meaning of the word *A'chik*. According to him, although the real meaning of *A'chik* is hill it also has another etymological meaning. It is said in a legend that Garos living in the hill areas were all independent before and free from all outside oppressions. When the British occupied the Garo Hills, their independence was seriously threatened. In this situation, Garos assembled at a place and took oath by biting the soil as to protect their land from outside oppression. *A'a* means soil and *chick* means bite. Hence the Garos called themselves *A'chik* meaning the people who swore to fight for their freedom and independence to the last of men (Marak 1985:10). However, Marak discards the theory, as the story does not have clear indication about when, how and on what occasion the swearing was made (ibid:10). On the other hand Mihir N.

Sangma finds the story as a 'Definite' Garo legend. He examines possible options about the origin of the word *A'chik*. According to him, if the word *A'chik* is broken into two, it gives following two different meanings:

1. *A'a* means earth and *chik* or *chika* means bite.
2. *A'a* means earth, and *chik* or *bo'chik* means high undulating land (1993:4).

Mihir N. Sagma stresses upon both the meanings. He views that after the oath taking by biting soil the land of the people became known as *A'chik* land. Another view is that Garos before the occupation of present Garo Hills settled down in the plain districts and later on migrated to hills. They are called *A'chik*.

With regards to the term *Mande* we have various views and explanations. The Garos in the early days were known as "*Mandai*" as they resided in Tibet in a place called *Garu Mandai* lake. The Garos, who had migrated from the place were known as *Garu Mandai*. The name was a corruption from the word *Mandai* (Marak, 1985:11). Playfair remarked that the name was a contraction for *Man-ni-de* or son of man (man being the name given throughout Assam to the Burmese). He was doubtful about the proposition as he never met a Garo who thought himself to be a descendant from Burmese. He examined another tale which said that one of the ancestors of the Garos was named *Noro-Mande*, and formerly Garos were used to call themselves *Noro-Mande* after him. In course of time first part of the name was dropped and the later was retained (1909:8). He thought this derivation must be rejected, as it was more than probable that the first part of the name

Noro was of Sanskrit origin. Marak rejected these two suggestions. He said:

“The theory that the word Mande is a corruption of ‘Man-ni-de’ or ‘Noro-Mande’ are mere conjectures. The names might have been given to the Burmese in Assam, but the Garos are not Burmese in origin. The theory that Noro Mande is a Garo leader is also not proved” (1985:12).

Contrary to this, Mihir N. Sangma preferred to think that the name Mande was an altered form of the name of Garo chief Noro-Mande (1993:6). Another theory was that a group of Garos migrated to Burma (Myanmar) from eastern Tibet under the leadership of Raja Sriramp and they settled down for many years on the Bank of the river Irrawardi at a place called Mandalaya<sup>19</sup>. At that time, the aboriginal people of Burma knew the Garos as the inhabitants of Mandalay and since then they have been known as Mandalayas or Manda or Mande (M N. Sangma, 1993: 5).

We find no reference of “Mandi” in the early literature. The term “Mandi” also has the same meaning human being as “Mande”. We can guess that this might be a corruption from the term Madai or Mande.

## 2.5 Traditional Religion and Christianity

Traditional Garo religion is *Sangsarek*, which advocates the existence of supernatural. The major part of their religious activities is devoted to the appeasement of spirits responsible for misfortune. Playfair describes it as an

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<sup>19</sup> Burling suggested, “Mandalay has had some popularity as a hypothetical origin point, probably because its name sounds a bit like “Mandi” or “Mande”.”(1997: 8)

animistic religion. He writes:

“Like all animistic religions, that of the Garos consists of the belief in a multitude of beneficent and malevolent spirits, To some is attributed the creation of the world, to the others the control of natural phenomena; and the destinies of man from birth to death are governed by a host divinities whose anger must be appeased by sacrifice, and whose good offices must be entreated in like manner” (1909:80).

The majority of the Garos are now Christians. They are divided mainly into two denominations: the Baptist and the Catholics. In Bangladesh the Catholics are the majority and the Baptists are the second. In early 1995 the census made by the Parishes listed 14141 Mandis in Bangladesh, of whom 9,297 were Catholics, another 2,056 were Baptists, 917 were members of the Church of Bangladesh (Anglican, the domination that Americans call Episcopal) and 164 were Seventh Day Adventists (Burling, 1997: 176). Missionary attempt to convert other small ethnic people such as Hajongs, Hodies, Koches, and Banais was unsuccessful. In northern Mymensingh area only Garos became Christians. Bal observed:

“Today, Christianity is of great importance to the Garo community. More than ninety percent of the Garos proudly consider themselves Christians. Both the traditional Garo religion as well as its followers are called Sangsarek. Some of the old Garos are still Sangsarek. But unlike a couple of decades ago, onward signs of this religion are difficult to find, even more so in the border area than in Modhupur forest” (Bal, 2000: 15).

Christianity is the most important factor, which significantly influenced Garos. Apart from missionary activities, they established schools and hospitals and under took welfare activities. Due to the influence of the new

religion they shifted from their older beliefs of *Sangsarek* although they have retained basic tradition and social customs like clan organization and customary law and practices. Traditional ceremonies, festivals, dances, music have been substituted by Christian practice. Traditionally Garos have many ceremonies and festivals of which *Wangala* is the greatest. It is the main religious festival of the *sangsarek* Garos. It is also known as agricultural festival for its origin in *jhum* cultivation. They usually celebrate it after the monsoon and before winter season, when the harvest is complete. After the advent of Christianity, *Wangala* lost its significance along with other rites and festivals of religious and social nature.

Conversion to Christianity started in the early nineteenth century when American Baptists Mission had established their mission at the Garo Hills. Omed Momin and his nephew Ramke Momin became the first Garo converts to Christianity and baptized in Gauhati in 1863. They then preached among their relatives and after three years able to baptized 37 converts. Successive missionaries worked on the Garo Hills. Roman Catholic missionaries came next in the Garo Hills in 1933. Another mission Seventh Day Adventist also established their mission in 1954. As a result, conversion to Christianity increased and now with only a few exceptions, almost all Garos are Christians.

## **2.6 Origin of Matrilineality**

Origin of the matrilineal system among Garos is a matter of conjecture (Marak, 1985: 138). Passah suggested that they must have seen the inherent difficulties in patrilineal system and matrilineality might have been adopted due to the dire necessity in the tribe as a result of gradual evolution (2003:181).



It is not known exactly when the matrilineal system among the Garos began. According to a legend, Garos were a patrilineal community long before. Matrilineality was a later and conscious development. They discarded patriarchal system of marriage and inheritance as they thought the system was not practicable for various reasons, and adopted matrilineal kinship principles and inheritance pattern to safeguard their endangered common property as well as for better integration and continuity of the tribe.

It is said that they adopted matrilineal system about 500 or 600 years ago at a gathering held at the Bachelors Dormitory *Banepani Nokpanthe* (Patriarch Bone) situated at Misikokdok Hill in Garo Hills (Baldwin, 1934:150-151). The conference was hosted by a person named Amisangsa of the Megam sub-tribe of the Garos. The congregation of *Banepani Nokpanthe* was held under the chairmanship of Raja Siramp, and Raja Do'pa was the jurist (Marak, 1985:138). Following important decisions were made in the conference:

1. The rights of inheritance should go to women and never to men.
2. The parents should keep that last daughter or the one whom they are in favor of giving rights of inheritance at home, and hand over the common ancestors' property to her as heiress.
3. The Nephew (Gritang-sokchi) of the father of the house should be taken as son-in-law (Chaware A'kim) and he should look after his mother-in-law and father-in-law till their death and should also ensure a good understanding and cooperation in the family (Marak, 1985; 138).

Baldwin pointed out following three reasons for the shift from patrilineal to matrilineal system:

1. Primary reason for this change from patriarchal system to matriarchal, was to prevent further absorption of the Garos of the Assamese races, among whom the patriarchal system obtained.
2. The secondary reason was to prevent the passing of land from one clan to another. From time immemorial, Garo children had adopted their mother's name. But as the male children inherited the property, land repeatedly passed out of the hands of one clan into those of another. Thus, a Marak man marrying a Sangma woman would involve the property of Marak clan passing into the hands of the Sangma clan. And the next marriage would reverse the transfer.
3. Still another reason for discarding the patriarchal system was the fact that the whole male population of a village was frequently wiped out during head-hunting raids, or at least their numbers seriously depleted. So the change was made in order to ensure more continuity in the possession of immovable property (Baldwin, 1934:151-152).

## **2.7 Clan Organization and Descent Groups**

Garos are divided into a number of sub-ethnic groups. However, basic social structure, customary laws, food habits and value systems of all these groups are relatively uniform. Marak lists following sub-tribes of the Garos:

1. The Chisak
2. The Matchi
3. The Matabeng or Matjangchi
4. The Ambeng
5. The Dual or Matchi Dual

6. The Atong
7. The Gara-Ganching
8. The Chibok
9. The Ruga
10. The A`wes or A`kwes
11. The Megam
12. The Koch or Kotch or Kochus (Marak, 1985:2).

Apart from these subdivisions, some writers also have mentioned presence of four other subdivisions, namely Brac, Samon, Dali, and Gandai. But compared to other Garos, their population and habitat are so small and peripheral in size that they are almost non-existent as separate entities (Jengcham, 1994: 54).

Garos have five matrilineal decent groups or *chatchi* namely:

1. Sangma
2. Marak
3. Momin
4. Areng
5. Shira

Matrilineal decent groups are also subdivided into a number of exogamous divisions or clans (*ma'chong*). The most important unit in the Garo clan organization is a group comprising close matri-relations within the *ma'chong* called the *mahari*. The *mahari* plays a key role in the formation of a household, in its continuation and maintaining control of the relationships

between a husband and wife (Singh, 1994b: 282). A list<sup>20</sup> of *ma'chong* is given below:

**Sangma:**

Hagidak, Mankhin, Chiran, Cisham, Jengcham, Mrec, Manda, Ampang, Cisik, Dalbot, Kaksi, Snal, Jambil, Nengminja, Gabil, Micheng, Scu, Simsang, Thigidi, Awe, Rangmuthu, Balong, Daoa, Sampal, Boltak etc.

**Marak:**

Chambugong, Deo, Koknol, Maji, Nokrek, Napak, Pathang, Richil, Raksam, Rangsa, Dadak, Dafo, Ghagra, Bolwari, Rangma, Rangmothu, Ruram, Toju, Drong, Dajel, Khama, Dakogri, Sinthang, Chanda.

**Momin:**

Gabil, Chigisil, Dobit, Wacheksi, Darugri, Mrenda, Matchekgree, Jetra, Rema, Gandim, Watri etc.

**Areng:**

Dochik, Nabak etc.

**Sira:**

Dalbot, Hadima etc.

## 2.8 Kinship and Marriage

Fox (1967) expresses his view on the centrality of kinship in anthropology by saying “kinship is to anthropology what logic is to philosophy or nude is to art, it is the basic discipline of the subject” (1967:10). It is said that if there was a subject which anthropologists could have rightly be claimed as their own, it was kinship (Holy, 1996:1). But kinship occupies less central position in anthropology today than it was before (Burling, 1997:40). The declining importance of the study of kinship in anthropology can be seen as the result of the shift in contextualization. Traditionally, kinship was the focus of analytical attention and economy, politics or rituals were analyzed in the context of the attention paid to kinship relations. Nowadays analytical

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<sup>20</sup> Source: Jengcham (Sangma), Shuvas. *Garoder Sangskritik Jibondhara* (Dhaka: Bangla Academy, 1994:57-58) and Mrong, Anjon. “Garoder Bibaha Bebesther Sekal O Ekal”, in Srijon Sangma (ed.) *Janira*15 (Netrokona: Tribal Cultural Academy, Birishiri, 1999:20-21).

between a husband and wife (Singh, 1994b: 282). A list<sup>20</sup> of *ma'chong* is given below:

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**Marak:**

Chambugong, Deo, Koknol, Maji, Nokrek, Napak, Pathang, Richil, Raksam, Rangsa, Dadak, Dafo, Ghagra, Bolwari, Rangma, Rangmothu, Ruram, Toju, Drong, Dajel, Khama, Dakogri, Sinthang, Chanda.

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attention focuses on the processes of reproduction, construction of gender and sexuality or of self and personhood, and kinship is discussed in the context of these processes (Holy, 1996:5-6). However, among Garos kinship still occupies central position. It occupies central position in their clan organization, social relations as well as in the process of construction of their gender and productive and reproductive activities. It also helps to define the special place that Garo women have in their society (Burling, 1997:40). It is the main organizing principle that holds their society together. It is the kinship that separates them from their patrilineal neighbors. No ethnographic discourse of today can proceed without discussing this fundamental aspect of their community. Without understanding their unique kinship rules it is difficult to understand dynamics of Garo society.

Major A. Playfair gave an extended description of the strictly exogamous Garo marriage system descended from kinship system and law of inheritance. His book *The Garos* published in 1909 stands out as the earliest systematic account of the Garo where he first recognized their matrilineality. He wrote:

“In theory marriage is strictly exogamous among the Garos, and husband and wife must belong to different septs and motherhoods. Thus a Sangma cannot marry a Sangma, a Marak a Marak or a Momin a Momin. The children invariably belong to the mother’s sept and motherhood. Great importance is attached to this rule, and those who break it, and marry within their own clan are considered to have committed a social sin” (Playfair, 1909:66).

Robbins Burling in his book *The Strong Women of Madhupur* gave a vivid description of traditional family and kinship system of the Garos. He wrote:

“Each Garo belongs to what an anthropologist would call a “lineage”, a group of people who are regarded as kin and who share the same family name. Since the lineage name comes from one’s mother, a woman will always have the same name and lineage as her brothers, her sisters, her children, her sisters’ children, and her daughters’ children. People are forbidden to marry within their own lineage, and this means that a woman’s father and husband must come from some other lineage than her own, and so must her brothers’ children, her sons-in-law, her daughters-in-law and her sons’ children. Too many people share the same lineage name, and they are spread too widely, for all to act together as an organized group, but the members of a lineage who are closely related and who live within easy traveling distance depend on one another for all sorts of mutual assistance. They visit each other to seek advice and assistance. They gather at times of crisis. Whether or not the actual lines of kinship can be traced, marriage to someone with the same lineage name is regarded as outrageous” (Burling, 1997: 41).

Two important laws, exogamy and *a'kim* regulate the marriage system of the Garos. There are two main exogamous groups, *Sangma* and *Marak*, they regulate marriage among the Garos. These groups are called *chatchi* (clan). Burling refers to these groups as “moieties”<sup>21</sup>. A member of the third group,

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<sup>21</sup> “Like the lineages of Rengsanggri, most of those in Madhupur can be assigned to one of the two predominantly exogamous (outmarrying) “moieties” known respectively as “Sangma” and “Marak”. A small minority of lineages consider themselves to be Momin rather than either Sangma or Marak, and they accept marriages with either of two larger groupings” (Burling, 1997:151).

namely *Momin*<sup>22</sup> can marry either a *Sangma* or *Marak*. Still a *Momin* cannot marry a *Momin*. That means moiety exogamy is maintained by the *Momin* group also (Khaleque, 1984:227). But the rule of exogamy is more strictly observed at the level of *ma'chong* than at *chatchi* level. Marriage between a man and woman belonging to the same clan is not uncommon. If there is a marriage within the same clan the couple is ridiculed as *bacdong* (marrying one's relative). In the past it was treated as an offence, and those couples were not allowed to stay in the village. They were chased away from the locality. With the passage of time, now community has accepted this deviation.

Until today, marriage in the same *ma'chong* is strictly prohibited and one who breaks this law is called *madong* (one who marries his mother). In the early days it was regarded as serious offence and often death penalties were imposed on lawbreakers.

Another important kinship principle behind Garo marriage system is called *a'kim*. With the marriage a permanent relationship is established between the two *ma'chongs* of husband and wife. This relationship is known as *a'kim*, which is perpetual. Even after the death of a spouse, the deceased spouse's *ma'chong* is under obligation to provide a replacement for the surviving man or woman, particularly from the close relation of the deceased. The word *a'kim* in its ordinary sense means the mutual rights and responsibilities

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<sup>22</sup> "Because of the Momins, who permit marriages with either Sangma or Marak, the term "moiety" is not an entirely accurate term for these groups. "Moiety" is properly used for a society with a simple two-way division. Sangma and Marak are clearly dominant among the Mandis, however, and in spite of the Momins, they are seen as complimentary mutually intermarrying groups. They act so much like proper moieties that I find the term convenient in spite of a certain imprecision" (Burling, 1997: 151).



which accompany marriage and which bind together the two *mahari* or lineages. But the original meaning of the word *a'kim* is nephew (Marak, 1985:129).

Traditionally Garos practice “cross-cousin marriage”. According to their custom a man marries his mothers brother’s daughter, real or classificatory, though a preference is always given to the mother’s brother’s daughter. (Khaleque, 1984: 226). As regards marriage of heiress daughter (*nokna*) a real sister’s son of the father of the girl is always preferred, but when such spouse is not available a classificatory sister’s son from various distinct relatives can also be selected from the father’s *ma'chong*. This means that for instance two people may be simultaneously close matrilineal cross-cousins and distant patrilineal cross-cousins (Burling, 1963: 93).

Garos marriage system is inter-woven with the pattern of their inheritance. Following the nature of inheritance different types of marriages have been developed. Basically two kinds of marriage have been prevailing among them. One is called *nokna* marriage or marriage of the heiress. Other one is known as *agati* marriage or marriage of the non-heiress daughter. Traditional custom of selecting husband for *nokna* from her father’s real or classificatory sister’s son is still followed. In case of *agati* marriage the rule is flexible as a non-heiress daughter can choose her husband from any *ma'chong*. Yet, the rule of exogamy is maintained, as by tradition they are not allowed to marry with in the same *ma'chong*.

To maintain an enduring relationship between lineages of the husband and wife, even after the death of any one of them, two types of “Replacement” marriage have been developed among them. These are “Mother-in-law

Marriage” and “Step-Daughter Marriage”. According to the custom after the death of father-in-law this is an obligation to *nokrom* (husband of *nokna*) to marry his widowed mother-in-law, who is also his mother’s brother’s wife. In such a situation *nokrom* assumes anomalous position as husband to both mother and daughter (Playfair, 1909:68-69). But this rule is not binding on the husband of the non-heiress daughter.

According to the custom a widow is provided with a new husband from amongst *mahari* of the deceased husband. Generally it is difficult to get a suitable person of the same age of the widow as men of her own age were usually already married. In such a situation, "the only solution was to recruit a younger and still unmarried man to become her husband, but persuading a younger man to marry a somewhat older woman could present a problem. That could be solved by promising him, at the same time, the woman’s daughter and heiress as a second wife. If the daughter was still small at the time her mother was widowed, he might have to wait some years for his new wife to grow up, but once she had matured she would become the co-wife of her mother” (Burling, 1997:46). Khaleque remarks:

“The end results in either of the cases (mother-in-law marriage or step-daughter marriage are the same as in both the cases the mother and her own daughter become the co-wives of the same man at the same time. It is curious that some times the mother and her own daughter beget children from the same man” ((Khaleque, 1984:230).

When a wife dies, her sister generally substitutes her. But in case of non-availability of such sister from her *mahari* any other girl from among the close relations may be selected as his second wife. If after the death of a wife, widower is provided with an old woman as his wife, the situation may

create similar problem. Giving a young girl as his second wife again could solve it. This type of marriage is called *jik'gite*.

When a wife or husband dies, the *chra* or *mahari* of the deceased shall have to provide another husband or wife as the case may be. If they fail to provide another spouse for the widow or widower, the law of *a'kim* could be broken by the deceased motherhood.

Monogamous marriage is a norm among them, while polygamy<sup>23</sup> is also allowed. A husband may marry a second wife for various other reasons also. When first wife is physically handicapped or in the cases of childlessness, blindness etc. second wife (*jikgite r'aa*) could also be taken with the prior consent of the first wife or *mahari*.

Divorce is allowed according to the Garo customary law. But it cannot be given arbitrarily. For seeking divorce or relief from partner, there should have sufficient grounds. Adultery, impotency, insanity and cruelty of spouse or refusal to continue family union by spouse are considered reasonable grounds for divorce. If a husband divorces his wife on any ground, which is not deemed satisfactory, he loses his entire claim over property. Besides, after the divorce given from either husband or wife, their children always remain with the mother<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Polygamy is not at all very common practice among the Garos. It was not so in the traditional period also. People of the older generation can cite only a few instances of very rich or very powerful men marrying two or more wives. However in the traditional society provision for polygamy exists (Majumder, 1985:296).

<sup>24</sup> Although marriage is a religious ceremony, it is not really a sacrament. There are neither sacraments nor couvertures in pagan marriages (Sangsarek). But in all cases, divorce must be initiated and approved by the wife's *chra*. (Marak, 1985:125)

Every society has an inherent and natural mechanism to absorb other culture or to assimilate with others; even a rigid society also undergoes transformation in course of time. With the passage of time Garos also have changed in many ways. There are many reasons responsible for cultural change among them. Influence of patrilineal Bangali society, conversion to Christianity, spread of modern education, change in the mode of agriculture, change in land ownership and tenural system; above all, change in the economic pattern may be cited as potential factors in this regard.

Garos are divided mainly into two exogamous groups *Sangma* and *Marak*. A third group *Momin* is added subsequently. Indeed, transformation in Garo kinship system is presumed to be taken place at the time when they extended descent group by incorporating *Momin* as a clan member. "The marriage of a *Sangma* girl with a Muslim from the plains brought in the *Momin* and the kinship demonstrated its unique structural strength in absorbing the new sept in matriliney by extending the kin rules" (Bhattacharya, 1985:241).

Few instances of breach of kinship principle were seen in the past. Playfair observed violation of kinship rule even in the early nineteenth century:

"I am told that many persons are breaking away from the old custom, and that nearly 10 percent of marriages, nowadays are in violation of the rules of exogamous marriage. Some persons even go so far as to marry within their own motherhood, though this breach of rule is rarer than the first, and is looked upon with proportionate disapproval by the more orthodox" (Playfair, 1909: 67).

Even today, the rule of exogamy is strictly observed, although recent situation provides more examples of deviation than the past. But Garos are

not yet prepared to accept this departure normally. It is still considered to be an act of incest, and couples, who break this rule, are often ridiculed. To avoid this unwanted situation couples of this kind are very likely to leave their villages after marriage or they keep them aloof from clan or lineage affairs. Apart from these deviations, many Garos are also found selecting their spouses from other communities such as Bangali Muslim, Hindu or Bangali Christian, although, such marriages are discouraged.

In principle, Garos affiliate themselves with their mother's lineage, and as a custom children take their mother's family name as their own. But now we can witness the tendency of naming children after their father's: Bal observes:

“Especially among urban middle-class Garos, we can witness the tendency of name children after their fathers. This is a significant break with Garo kinship. Today parents defend that choice by explaining that the name is the father's, but the *ma'chong* remains the mother's. This trend, if continued, will lead to serious complications where present-day kinship rules (and therefore spousal choice) are concern” (Bal, 2000:95).

Garos cannot marry within their own (mother's) *ma'chong*. Even if some one takes father's family name, this never implied that actual identity of the person concerned would shift from mother's to father's side. Rather tendency of taking father's surname could lead to confusion at the time of their spousal choice. How they will cope with this situation, since as a rule, spouses are chosen from other *ma'chong* than that of mother's. One of my informants says that since actually they belong to mother's *ma'chong*, at the time of marriage spousal choice would be followed in accordance with the traditional rule. This is, no doubt, is a compromise with the tradition.

Traditional practice of taking clan surname (*Sangma* or *Marak*) is also under going changes. It is observed that in Bangladesh, a large number of Garos are not taking their clan surname; instead they are taking their *ma'chong* title such as Chiran, Chambugong, Mrong, Rema, and Nokrek etc. after their name. In the Birishiri (Durgapur) area of Netrokona district, older practice of taking clan surname is still common. But the picture is different in many other places. During my fieldwork in the Sherpur district, I have found only a few of them have taken clan surname such as *Sangma* or *Marak* after their name. Most of them are now known with the name of their *ma'chong*.

Traditional practice of *jhum* cultivation by the Garos has now almost disappeared. Instead, they have learned to plough wet rice with the influence of Bangali neighbors. The notion of communal or *a'king* land is still known to the Garos but the system is no longer in work today. *Jhum* lands gradually have decreased with the increase of population, and also due to the extension of forests reserve by the government. This situation ultimately has compelled Garos to learn wet rice cultivation like their neighbors. The concept of private property has developed among them with new sets ideas in respect of inheritance and land tenure system after permanent cultivation was introduced and adapted.

In the Garo sense of family organization, property and inheritance are inter related. Transmission of property through female line follows some specific rules and principles. With the development of private ownership traditional land tenure system has changed substantially. As a result traditional system of selecting *nokna* (heiress) and *nokrom* or the notion of *a'kim* bond lost its significance.

With the advent of Christianity many practice and rituals related to the older religion *Sangsarek* were abandoned. But Christianity has not touched fundamental aspects of their matrilineal society. There are many things of their culture that have been little affected by this new religion. In particular, surprisingly Christianity has had little effect on family and kinship practices (Burling, 1997; 188). Descent is still traced through women and property transmitted from mother to daughter. Children still take their mothers name and affiliate themselves with the kinship group of mothers. Matrilineality still continues to be the organizing principle of kinship relationship. "Christianity has changed the religion of the Garos and obviously there have been changes in the outlook of the people; Christianity never touched fundamental structures of the society, rather it allowed them to remain in its original form. Thus, matriliney is approved by the Christianity" (Khaleque, 1984:233).

However, Christianity has significant influence on marriage pattern of the Garos. They no longer observe old marriage ceremonies of the *Sangsarek* Garos now. It doesn't mean that they have abandoned all *Sangsarek* practices or rituals. Few are still exist. For example, until today, at the time of marriage, following *Sangsarek* tradition they kill fowls, and drink *Chu* (rice beer) during festivity. Yet, marriage ceremony is mainly performed according to the Christianity. With the influence of Christianity traditional practice of "Bride-groom capture" has disappeared. Attitude toward traditional system of replacement marriage has also changed to a great extent. Christianity doesn't approve mother-in-law or step-daughter marriage. Nor does this is approved by the Muslims and Hindus. Garos are now not in a position of accepting these types of replacements marriages.

*Jikgite* (having two wives) marriages are now being discouraged for economic reasons and peaceful family co-existence.

## 2.9 Law of Inheritance

Law of inheritance or property right is one of the most important criteria of Garo matrilineality. Kinship and inheritance are profoundly interrelated in their social organization. Kinship bond among the members of the community is also characterized by their inheritance pattern that follows female line.

According to the traditional law of inheritance, no man can either possess any property or can inherit any property under any circumstances. Property of the parents either movable or immovable goes to the women. All property inherited or acquired after the marriage by husband becomes the property of his wife. Male children cannot receive or claim any property even though they may have acquired such property by their own labor. Man has the authority to control and manage the property as he always acts as the manager of his wife's property. In his absence property is disposed with the decision or consent of the elder male persons (who are known as *chra*) of wife's *mahari*.

The property of a family belongs entirely to the *ma'chong* (motherhood) and retains within the *ma'chong* through the institution of *nokrom* and *a'kim*. Property once in motherhood cannot pass away from it either movable or immovable. A daughter inherits the property and after her, one of her daughters inherits it. All the daughters of a family do not equally inherit property. If the parents are wealthy, they may give some portion of their properties to other daughters also. This is generally done out of love and



affection. In such cases parents land and other property may not equally be distributed among all their children. The daughter with whom the parents live in their old age is given the larger part of parent's land and property.

Traditionally a woman's property is passed onto one of her daughters. One of the daughters (ideally, the youngest one) is selected as *nokna* (heiress) and her husband is known as *nokrom*. A *nokrom* should preferably be the real nephew of the father of *nokna*. If a couple has no female child then a girl, preferably the daughter of her sister, real or classificatory is adopted as heiress. A son-in-law other than *nokrom* is called *agati*. A *nokrom* resides in the household of his parents-in-law and helps them in all household works. When his parents-in-law become old he assumes responsibilities as the head of the household.

Shifting cultivation was the only method of cultivation practiced by the major portion of the Garos until few decades ago, and for all practical purposes land was regarded as the common property of the village. According to the traditional system of Garo Hills the entire land in a village was communally held by the villagers or vests under the ownership of a *mahari*. Such common land known as *a'king* was considered to be the property of a particular *mahari*. The management of *a'king* was under the control of the *Nokma* (Headman) who used to act in close co-ordination with the villagers.

In fact changes in the livelihood pattern has changed traditional inheritance pattern of the Garos to a great extent. Majumder has observed that with the adaptation of permanent cultivation the concept of landed property owned by individual families has developed and with it a new set of ideas have

developed regarding its transmission from one generation to the next (Majumder, 1985:304). As a result, instances of land transfer by mothers to their sons have increased. This is a remarkable deviation from the principle of matrilineal inheritance.

Khaleque observed that traditional system of communal ownership of land and tenural arrangement that prevailed among Garos of the Garo Hills did not work in Madhupur Garh. Instead, the concept of individual household ownership developed there. He discussed several possibilities as a reason, and held that the imposition of external land tenure system was probably the main factor that compelled or encouraged them to follow individual ownership. The idea of leasing or mortgaging land, which was unknown to the Garo, was also introduced to them from external sources. Ownership of land and other property was also in a process of change from matrilineal to patrilineal (1992:241-242).

Yet, according to his observation the right of ownership to all property still belongs to women. Thus, in principle whatever an unmarried man may earn belongs to his mother. When mother is not alive, property belongs to his sister. In case of a married man such property belongs to her wife. A woman before her marriage is not allowed to own or retain property and such property is passed on to her mother (1992:241-242). Traditional practice of selecting *nokna* or *nokrom* is no longer followed among the Garos of Madhupur, although everyone knows the principle. The tradition of parents' living with one of their daughters, however, is still maintained. Nevertheless, this daughter is no longer distinguished from others by calling her *nokna*, nor is her husband called *nokrom*. The marriage of this daughter may or may

not be arranged according to the ideal principles, but she and her husband assume the responsibility of *nokna* and *nokrom* (1992:132)

Burling observed that inheritance rules were straightforward and unambiguous in *Rengsangirri*. A few small items might be given to children to help them setup their independent households, but otherwise every thing passed to heiress daughter and her husband. Since no productive land was inherited no one regarded this as unjust (Burling, 1963:147). But in Madhupur he observed different situation and absence of a 'single and unambiguous' rule. Since both wet and dry agricultural lands were privately owned inheritance became far more important matter in Madhupur. Practice of individual property transfer was not uniform everywhere, and not always followed traditional rules. In the absence of a general consensus on the issue, instances of land transferred to the children in varied degree were observed among them.

He also observed a considerable change in outlook among the Garos of Madhupur regarding transfer, acquisition and distribution of property. He wrote:

"The older role that assigned everything to the heiress is well known in Madhupur, and it is some times cited as the rule that Mandis still ought to follow. At the same time that rule now seems unfair to the other children, and other, though less well articulated, principles now compete with the older practice in determining the distribution of property. Some people suggest that even if land is not left entirely to the heiress it should at least go to daughters rather than to sons, or it may be said that sons should inherit as well, but with a smaller share than their sisters. I have been offered entirely explicit rules. One man told me that the heiress daughter should get one half of the property and that the rests should be split

among the other children, with daughters' shares being twice as large as those of the sons. I doubt if such rules are ever followed with precision, and the actual examples that people have described for me came closer to an equal division. Caretakers generally get more than other children but often it is less than half. Sons may be given almost as much land as their sisters. The most important fact is the lack of general consensus about the rules. No Mandi authority exists that could legislate a new rule that is adapted to present land tenure, and no governmental body that is controlled by Bengalis is likely to legislate an acceptable rule. Perhaps a new rule will eventually crystallize out of individual decisions, but in the meantime the parents are left with considerable discretion'(1997:148).

In *Andharupara* of Sherpur district, Islam witnessed a strong urge for change in their traditional inheritance pattern. It appeared to him a sort of change from matrilineal to patrilineal pattern, although matrilineal pattern of ownership and inheritance continued (1986:295). He further observed that due to free access to forest in that area, in the past, traditional *jhum* cultivation were followed by the Garos without paying revenues to the Government or any individual, and land was treated as communal land (*a'king*). This communal ownership of land was substituted by private ownership and *jhum* cultivation by wet rice cultivation. Their dependence on *jhum* cultivation was shattered by the abolition of *zamindari* and control of the forests by the government. As a result, land tenural arrangements changed to private ownership of land through purchase or allotment from government. "The private ownership of land and shift to wet cultivation is not only making them a market oriented but also a class oriented society. As a consequence, production relations have also changed to that of landlord and wage labour" (Islam, 1986:298).

## 2.10 Post-marital Residence

Traditionally, post-marital residence pattern of the Garos is matrilocal. Matrilocal means residence of the couple with or close to the wife's mother. Ideally, after marriage a Garo husband moves to his wife's house or village as 'son-in-law' of his 'parents-in-law'. When marriage is performed with the heiress (*nokna*) daughter, the nature of marriage is both 'matrilocal' and 'avunculocal'. A husband (*nokrom*) of the heiress daughter is selected from her father's lineage and her father's sister's son (nephew) is the ideal choice. After marriage *nokrom* is supposed to reside with his parents-in-law's family and it is his duty to help them in all household affairs. After the death of 'father-in-law' *nokrom* assumes responsibility as the head of household. In case, a suitable nephew is not available, a sister's son has to be chosen from a distant relation from the same lineage. Matrilocal and avunculocal in the sense that after marriage *nokrom* is supposed to live in his wife's house; which is his maternal uncle's house also. There is no strict rule as regards non-heiress daughter's marriage and residence choice. A husband other than *nokrom* enjoys considerable freedom regarding choice of spouse and residence within the framework of exogamous kinship rule. A non-heir couple usually lives with the parents in wife's village, until they can establish a separate household of their own. Intermediary period of residence with the parents could be termed as initial or temporary residence since, eventually they move to new households, either in the same village or any other place of preference for any number of reasons. Another type of residence is known as "going as daughter-in-law", which is patrilocal in nature; where after marriage wife moves to her husband's house. In this residence pattern, women do not remain in their own house after marriage. Rather newly married couples establish their households in groom's father's

house or near to that. Another type of residence is neolocal, which is known as the residence of a couple after marriage in a new household not linked spatially to that of the groom's or the bride's kin.

In *Rengsangri* Burling observed variation of residence pattern. This, according to him could be explained in two ways: from the point of view of the households, and from the point of view of the village. He wrote:

“It is clear that the residence rules of the Garos appear entirely different depending upon whether one considers locality from the point of view of the individual household or from that of the village as a whole. From the point of view of the households, heir marriages are uxorilocal and at the same time avunculocal, since a man lives with both his wife and his maternal uncle; non-heir marriages are neolocal, since the couple always establishes a new and separate household; and replacement marriages are localized at the residence which was occupied by the previous spouse before he or she died. From the point of view of the village, the most common marriage requires that a man move to his wife's village but as has been explained, some wives move instead and the resulting “reversed” marriages lead to a number of other patterns. The distinction between village residence and household residence has rarely been made clear in the anthropological literature, but it is an essential distinction for the Garos and undoubtedly and for many other people. The residence of each married couple can be considered in both ways. It frequently happens, for instance, that a boy moves to his wife's village at his marriage but sets up a new household with her there. Such a marriage is uxorilocal with respect to the village but neolocal with respect to the household” (Burling, 1963:212-213).

He also expressed view that the diversity of Garo residence pattern was not an indication of change; neither had it indicated “loose structuring” of the

society. Rather according to him, all residence patterns were necessary to Garo Kinship structure. He said:

“Some men must move in with their wives’ families, while others must set up new households. Some men must move to their wives’ villages while others must bring their wives to their own villages. The diversity of residence patterns is no more indicative of change than the presence of both horizontal and vertical girders in skyscraper construction is an indication of changing architectural techniques. All residence patterns have their essential part in Garo social structure” (1963:215-216).

Madhupur area of Bangladesh was not as traditional in the sense that Rengsangri of Garo Hills district of India was in 1950s. In Madhupur he observed “very gradual changes” in the pattern of post-marital residence, and stressed upon its long time significance for Mandi kinship (Burling, 1997:131). He observed two kinds of marriage residence in Madhupur; these were “going as a son-in-law” and “going as a daughter-in-law”. First type was traditional in the Mandi sense, and later was considered as a Bangali practice. He observed that households continued to live matrilocally more often than patrilocally though less consistently so than they did in Rengsangri. Temporary patrilocality was also observed common with increased trends. He explained:

“The evidence is open to two interpretations. Those residing with the husbands’ parents are mostly quite young, and perhaps they represent a trend in which younger people are turning to patrilocality. On the other hand, their initial residential arrangements may not be permanent, and they may later revert to more traditional matrilocality residence” (1997:133).

Besides, the existence of large number of nuclear families clearly indicates changes in their traditional family organization. Traditionally Garo parents nominate one of the daughters to be the heiress who is known as *nokna*. In the older days it was obligatory for *nokna* to reside with her parents after marriage. On the other hand, non-heiress daughter establishes neolocal households after a probationary period of one or more years. But they now do not follow this rule strictly. Now young couples are found to be more willing to live independently in a separate house near their parents. Even some parents are also seen interested to allow their offsprings to live separately so that they can establish themselves. Nevertheless, they keep relations and extend mutual help with their paternal families even after the establishment of separate households. Besides, for a period they remain in the same 'eating group'. In the present situation village can not give subsistence to all due to population pressure. Because of this economic consideration many families move away to some distant places to find better prospect of living. These factors have changed their residence choice to a great extent showing a declining trend of joint families in their present household structure.

### **2.11 Position of Women and Men**

Generally, it is thought that in the Garo society women dominate over the males. The idea does not project actual situation prevailing among Garos in regard to the role and status of women and men. In spite of the fact that women plays significant role in the process of production and reproduction, in the affairs of *mahari* they are supposed to abide by the decision of their male elders. Through property is inherited by the females, the males have



the authority to control and manage it. Position of husband in Garo society is high and respectable. He is considered as the head of the household and guardian of the family<sup>25</sup>. Playfair also mentioned unquestionable authority of husband in regard to the control of wife's property (1909:72).

As we discussed before that Garo society is both matrilineal and avuncular in nature. It is the uncles or sons of a family who exercise their avuncular authority in the decision-making process of their mother's house, especially in the process of selection of *nokrom*, and through *nokrom* motherhood of the husband maintains its hold on the property of the wife. The name *nokrom* is derived from two words; *nol* means house and *krong* means post. He is regarded as the real pillar of the house. "With the advent of *nokrom* it may be said that a dual control is exercised over all property, the balance being in favour of the wife's *ma'chong* (Playfair, 1909:73). Position of *chra-pante* is also important in this regard. According to their customary law *chra-pante* consists of all nearest male relatives of the wife's side, such as maternal uncles, great uncles, nephews and brothers. Duties and responsibilities of *chra* are manifold. They play most important role in sharing and administering welfare of the family. The ancestral property may be disposed of in consultation with the *chra* or *mahari*, who have the sole authority over such properties. When all the *chra* and *mahari* agree to sale such property, only then the sale shall be valid otherwise not (Marak, 1985:139).

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<sup>25</sup> Following Garo words are clear indication of the higher position of a husband in the family: *Nokin Skotong* (Head of the house or family), *Nokin Nokgipa* (Master or Guardian of the house) *Nokni Padot* (Patriarch of the family) (Marak, 1985:148).

The institution of Nokmaship was another aspect of male authority in the Garo community. Traditionally *nokma* was regarded as the head of village authority and commanded high respect. His duties and responsibilities were manifold. He used to settle inter-clan disputes, performed religious and ceremonial rites, and worked as the representative of the owner of a *'king*. He was the pivot of the village organization through which the basic network of the entire society was woven. In fact *nokma* played the leading role as the central figure in the village activities and extremely represented the village (Majumdar, 1985:262). As a custom, selection of *nokma* was always done from males, never from females. Nokmaship is a dying institution today and no more in work in the traditional sense of the term. Recent revival of *nokma* is only seen for ceremonial purpose, and they too are being selected from the male members of the community.

In the traditional pattern of Garo family the women did not suffer from insecurity because even after marriage she continued to get protection from her lineage. This helped women to keep her status in the changing circumstances. Indeed they have achieved a better balance in their gender roles compared to many other South Asian societies. Both men and women share mutual rights and responsibilities in their household affairs. Both women and men have important jobs to do and their work complements one another. In course of time men lost some traditional warfare or ceremonial responsibilities, but yet, until today, they have the formal positions of leaderships and make important decisions. However, women are never secluded, they have the right to express their opinion and they share fully in household decisions.

It is also evident today that economic pattern of Garos are changing substantially. Recent trend indicates that Garo women are now coming out of their domestic sphere in increased numbers and are seeking employment outside for livelihood. The nature and extent of women's participation and their contribution in economic activities is an important indicator of change, and seems to play vital role in determining status of women in Garo society.

## Chapter III

### Regional Background of the Study Area

*This chapter introduces the study area and contains brief history, description of location, physical environment of Sherpur district and Jhenaigati sub-district with an analysis of past and present ethnic situation. In this chapter we shall see how the process of cultural contact among different ethnic groups marked by conflict and reconciliation, adjustment and integration, shaped the nature of indigenous culture of the region. Relevant information is collected mainly from historical sources, census reports, and from personal observation during fieldwork.*

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#### 3.1 Sherpur District: Location and Brief History

Sherpur district is situated at the northeastern part of Bangladesh. It is bounded by Garo Hills of Meghalaya of India on the north, on the south and east by Mymensingh District and on the south and west by Jamalpur District. It lies between 24°18' and 24°18' north latitude and between 89°53' and 90°91' east longitudes. The total area of the District is 1,363.76 sq.km. (526.55 sq. miles) of which 6.81 sq.km. is riverine and 51.80 sq.km is forest area. The district was established on the 22 February 1994. Previously it was a subdivision of Jamalpur District. Main rivers are Bramaputra, Mrigi, Malijhee, Bhogai, Chellashali and Moharishi. Total population of the district is 1,138, 629. Among them 95% are Muslims, 4% are Hindus, 0.5%, are Christians, and others are 0.5%. The District has 5 Upazilas, 2 Municipalities, 43 Unions, 458 Mouzas, and 678 Villages. Upazilas are Sherpur Sadar, Naltabari, Nokla, Sribordi, and Jhenaigati.

It is said that it was under *Pragjotisha* or *Kamrupa* in the ancient times. During the period of *Ramayana* and *Mohavarata* Kamrup was called

*Pragjotisha*. We came to know from the travelogue of Chinese traveler Hieu en Tsang that during that time the whole Bengal was divided into six major kingdoms<sup>26</sup>, *Kamrupa* (comprised of East Bengal with eastern part of Mymensingh and Assam) was one of them. During that time Mymensingh area was divided into two parts: east and west by mighty river Brahmaputra. Present Sherpur was located at the northeast corner of east Mymensingh<sup>27</sup>. During that time Brahmaputra was such a big water body that it was thought to be an ocean, and the area of present Sherpur was almost unknown to the people of Bengal and Assam. Historical evidences show that it was never under any single ruler in the past. Due to inaccessibility and geo-environmental position of the area, control of any central kingdom or power was never dominant. This is how a self-sustaining regional political structure with several feudal units seemed to have emerged. According to the regional history and legends, in the pre-colonial period socio-political structure of the region was controlled by different localized *rajas* of different ethnic identity. The area was never been under any firm administrative rule. Instead, it had been marked by a long history of changes between periods of regional independence and assimilation into larger states. The power over the area, or parts of it, had been shifting hand for many centuries, and several groups of people, including the Garos, had been involved in this power struggle (Bal, 2000:162)

One of such *rajas* was known as *Dalipa or Dalip Samnanta* (feudal lord). In the thirteenth century he established his control over a vast area surrounding

<sup>26</sup> See Professor Delwar Hossain, 1969. *Sherpurer Itikatha* (History of Sherpur), p. 22-23.

<sup>27</sup> See Professor Delwar Hossain, 1969. *Sherpurer Itikatha* (History of Sherpur), p. 25.

present *Garh Jaripa*<sup>28</sup> of Sherpur. It is said that *Dalipa* was a Koch *raja*, and a Muslim warlord killed him probably at any time during the last part of fifteenth century and the area came under Muslim control<sup>29</sup>.

Mymensingh was annexed to the Mughul Empire by Islam Khan (1608-1613 A.D), the Mughal Governor of Bengal during the reign of Emperor Jahangir. During the period of Emperor Akbar, Sherpur *pargana*<sup>30</sup> was called *Dashkahonia Baju*. At the first part of the seventeenth century, the Gazis of the Bhawal occupied *Dashkahonia* area from the descendants of Isha Khan. *Dashkahoni pargana* was named Sherpur after the name of Sher Ali Gazi, the last *Jaigirdar* of Gazi dynasty.

It was alleged that Sher Ali Gazi murdered a Hindu man named Ramaballav with an ill intention to get his beautiful wife. Later on he was sentenced to death by a Mughal court of law for this offence. Subsequently the heir of the deceased pardoned him when he had agreed to hand over the claim of his *zamindari* to Ramonath, son of Ramaballav. Sher Ali passed his last days in isolation, and after his death, he was buried at *Gazir Khamar* area of Sherpur. After this incident *zamindari* of Sherpur *pargana* went permanently to the hands of Hindu *zamindars*. However, there are difference of opinions

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<sup>28</sup> The area *Garh Dalipa* is now known as *Garh Jaripa* after the name of a Muslim saint Jarip Shah. It is situated about 8 miles to the north west of Sherpur town. Until today there exist ruins of a mud fort. It is not known when the fort was built. It is said that one *Dalip Samonta* was the builder of the fort. See *Bangladesh District Gazetteers Mymensingh* (1978:65)

<sup>29</sup> "Sherpur *Pargana* was annexed to Bengal when Sylhet was conquered by the Mohammedans in 1384, but was in the hand of the Koches until Hossain Saha colonized it with Mohammedans in the 16<sup>th</sup> century". See F. A. Sachse, *Gazetteer of Mymensingh District* (1917)

<sup>30</sup> During pre-colonial period Mymensingh was divided into 22 *Parganas*. Among them Sherpur was the largest.

about this particular story and some writers opine that Sher Ali Gazi was the victim of a conspiracy (Hossain, 1969:48)

### 3.2 Past Ethnic Situation of Sherpur

From the time immemorial, Sherpur has been a place of ethnic diversity. Apart from Bangali, other indigenous and small ethnic groups who inhabited the area were Hajong, Garo, Koch, Banai, Dalu, Hodi and Rajbansi, and Mandai (Chaudhuri, 1872:87). These ethnic groups mostly lived in remote rural areas or at the fringe of Garo Hills. Garo Hills was the actual home of the Garos, besides they were seen living in other plains also (ibid, 1872:87). Outside their hills, the Garos resided in greatest numbers in the Mymensingh district<sup>31</sup>. They occupied the whole of the north of that district, but many of them also lived further south and extended even into the Dacca (Dhaka) district (Playfair, 1909: 63).

According to the census of 1901 (Table-1) 33191 plain Garos were found in Mymensingh district. Among them 28598 were *Sangsarek*<sup>32</sup>, only 4133 were found Hindu and Christian Garos. Other than Garos some ‘Hinduized’ small ethnic communities inhabited the area. Bijoy Chandra Nag mentioned the presence of a few “hill dwelling and primitive” communities in Sherpur, such as Hajong, Koch, Dalu, Bonai, Hodi, Mandai and Rajbangshi (1336 Bangla: 132). Sometimes these people were thought to be a people of same

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<sup>31</sup> In the 1872 census, among other races Garo population in Dhaka was found only 13, while in Maimensing (Mymensingh) district number of Garo population was 10,997 (Hunter, 1877: 39,383-391)

<sup>32</sup> The term *Sangsarek* was not used in the census; rather in the census *Sangsarek* Garos were mentioned as the worshipers of evil spirit.

ethnicity. Even in the nineteenth century most of them were mentioned as Garo peasants in different documents. For example, in the Government report of 1860 Hajongs were reported as a “race of Mongrel Garos” and in the census of 1901 Dalus described as a ‘Hinduaized’ section of Garos” (Bhadra, 1994: 26).

Table-1

Distribution of Small Ethnic Population in Nalitabari and Sherpur Thana in 1901

Name of District/P.S	Garo		Hajong		Rajbongshi (Koch)		Hodi		Dalu	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Mymensingh District	16819	16372	13188	12400	26905	24931	11192	11054	2498	2343
Nalitabari	1643	1594	4195	4043	5343	5457	2375	2495	1374	1328
Sherpur	650	549	659	566	3022	2986	2061	2207	---	---

Source: Kedernath Mozumder, *Mymensingher Biboron*, 1987:70-75 (first published in 1907)

Among these ethnic people (including Garo) who lived at the foothills of Garo hills, Hajongs were the majority (Monising, 1983:20). Garo Hills were the main income source of *Shusang Rajas*. It is said that a considerable income of the *rajas* came from the capturing of wild elephants. Hajongs were said to have been brought by the *Shusang rajas* for *kheda* (an enclosure constructed to capture wild elephants) operation. Subsequently, they settled side by side with other communities in different places. During early nineteenth century they affiliated themselves to Hinduism, and a few of them became the followers of *Vaishnava* (one of the sects of Hinduism). In physical features Hajongs belong to Tibeto-Burman stock and could hardly be distinguished from the Garos. Their society is patrilineal and male



dominated. Property both movable and immovable goes to sons and equally shared.

Koches were more closely related to the Garos. It was probable that Koches inhabited the whole of the Garo Hills before the Garo invasion and possibly they represented an earlier wave of migration (District Gazetteer Mymensingh, 1978:59). In the census of 1901 (Table-1) Rajbangshi and Koch were thought to be the same ethnic group, and their number was reported as 41834 in the whole of Mymensingh district. But their population in the area decreased over time. For instance, Koches were numbered in 1911 in the district at 32000 and decreased to only about 5000 in 1961. A large numbers of Hodis was also found living in Mymensingh. They were counted at 22246 and 26000 in the census of 1901 and 1911 respectively. In 1961, their number decreased to 4000 (ibid: 57). They were known as a people of bad characters and great drunkards and treated by others as lower *Jat* (caste) (ibid: 59). Even *Dhopa* (cloth washer) or *Napit* (hair dresser) were reluctant to do their works. They were mainly the *lathiyal* (fighter with sticks) or *palkibahok* (palanquin bearer) or porter of the *zamindars*. In the third decades of twentieth century, an attempt was made to elevate them as *brataya khatriaya*. Under the leadership of Kedernath Chakrobarty they started receiving *poitas* (sacred thread/ cord worn by the first three classes of Hindus) and engaged themselves in the observance of different Hindu rituals. Their attempt to be upgraded in the caste system was opposed by the upper caste Hindus of Sherpur (Bhadra, 1994: 23, Nag: 1336Bangla:138). Dalu and Banai were also not very different from Koches, Hajongs and Hodis. By religion they were Hindus, although the influence of *Vaishnava*

was observed among them. In the 1901 census a few Dalus (2712) were found only in Nalitabari.

All these communities were generally organized as localized<sup>33</sup> groups with different traditions and customs. *Zamindars* played important role in their early settlement in some areas. Sometimes they were allowed to settle in the rent free *lacheraj* or *niskar* villages, and in return they offered menial services to the *zamindars*. They also helped *zamindars* in revenue collection activities. In order to ensure effective control over their jurisdictions, *zamindars* also encouraged settlement of skilled agricultural labors in the remote areas of Sherpur from different parts of Bengal. On the other hand Muslims came in successive waves of immigrations, mostly with the saints as their followers and with military leaders as conquerors. The “Pathans” and “Khans” are in theory descendent of the Afghans and other up-country followers of the Delhi generals, who fought in Bengal before the British rule. They settled down among the local people and grew in numbers over the centuries. They got absorbed among converts from Hinduism (District Gazetteer Mymensingh, 1978:53). In course of time Muslims became majority of the area followed by Hindus.

Table-2 represents a comparative statement of Muslim and Hindu population in Nalitabari and Sherpur in 1901. It shows that number of Muslim population is more than double compared to Hindu population of those two thanas.

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<sup>33</sup> Bhadra informed us that Koches and Hajongs were settled in the forested and *bhati* (low-lying) areas of Sherpur, mainly in the villages of Ranishimul, Ranigao, Kochnapara, Malkoch, and Tawkocha. Whereas Garos had been concentrated in those areas of Chandgao, Hatibhandha, Naiarkura, Nakgao, Kakarkandhi located at the outer fringe of the Garo Hills (Bhadra, 1994:29).

Table: 2

Distribution of Muslim and Hindu Population in Nalitabari and Sherpur  
Thana in 1901

Name of the P.S	Muslim			Hindu		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Nalitabari	30498	28019	58517	20100	18555	38655
Sherpur	60228	57284	117512	15220	12905	28125
Total	90726	85303	176029	35320	31460	66780

*Source: Kedernath Mozumder, Mymensingher Biboron, 1987:70-75 (first published in 1907)*

Indeed, the face of the indigenous culture of Sherpur was marked with the presence of people from different ethnicity: with the intercourse of Muslims and Hindus, hill people and plain people. In the process of culture contact and integration with the mainstream population many small communities like Dalu, Hodi lost their true significance as a different ethnic group. Their numbers also have decreased over the time in such an extent that might lead to their extinction as a community in future. Even Koch and Hajongs were also integrated with the Hinduism. Surprisingly only Garos have been able to maintain a distinct matrilineal kinship structure. They absorbed many things from others, but at the same time escaped conversion to either Islam or Hinduism. Rather, they were converted to Christianity, which worked as a means to maintain their separate entity.

There are obvious difference between Hill Garo and Plains Garo. Plains Garos or lowland Garos of Mymensingh area differs in many respects to their hill dwelling counterparts. Yet, many believe that Garo Hills is their real home and Garos of Mymensingh are the descendants of Garo migrants

from the Garo Hills<sup>34</sup> There was no international boundary before 1947 to restrict their movement from Garo Hills to the adjoining plains of Mymensingh district or *vice versa*. Garos of these two parts have maintained close and frequent contact with each other for different social and economic reasons. Dependence on market economy was also a reason for their upward and downward mobility.

During Mughal and subsequent British period, in Sherpur area the only place of social, economic and political contact between plains people and Garos were some frontier markets. Those markets were located mainly at the entry points of Garo Hills, such as in the areas of Maharishi, Vogai, Thalonga, Barak, Ghosgaon (Bhadra, 1994:32, Chaudhuri, 1872:65). In those markets many necessary articles were traded, especially cotton. In exchange of cotton Garos were used to purchase rice, salt and animals such as cattle, pig, goats etc. Another essential commodity for which Garos were totally dependent upon outsiders was a iron tool. Without iron Garo agriculture would have been impossible. There is no record that Garos themselves ever did more than minor repairs on their iron tools (Burling, 1997:19). However zamindars control over those frontier markets were not absolute at that time. Few makets were also established by the *zamindars* of Shusang and Sherpur in Mymensingh District, and Koroibari, Kalumalupara, Mechpara, and Habraghat in the plains since 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century. The technological backwardness made the Garos economically dependent on those markets. For them, frontier markets were the only way to make contact and exchange of products and household articles with the outside people. On the other

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<sup>34</sup> Mymensingh District Gazeeteer (1978: 57)

hand, for the *zamindars* those markets were the places where from they could establish effective control over ethnic areas.

Burling wrote:

“Even the Garos who lived in the hills beyond the direct rule of the zamindars were completely dependent upon the frontier markets where they exchanged their crops for essential goods. Early British reports make it clear that even in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Garos could hardly have survived without these markets. From in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century we have descriptions of goods that were traded, and these had probably not much changed since Mughal times. The Garos carried chilies, wax, and timber to sell at the market, but their most important trade good was always cotton” (1997:18).

Mughals were never able to integrate peripheral zones within the state structure. Throughout the Mughal rule a policy of non-interference was adopted in the northern Mymensingh. They didn't intervene in the management of this string of frontier estates<sup>35</sup>. The local landlords or *zamindars* were almost independent. In order to protect their estates against hill Garos, they were allowed to maintain small private armies called *barkondazes* (Bal, 2000:160). They only paid a minor tribute to the *fouzdar* or Mughal tax collector, while making enormous profits in the cotton trade at the expense of the independent hill Garos (Mackenzie: 1989: 245-246). These Garos needed the cotton trade just as much for the purpose of various goods and they depended totally on the markets along the foothills. The

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<sup>35</sup> “The whole of north-eastern frontier was divided into the estates Shusang and Sherpur in Mymensingh district, and Koroibari, Kalumalupara, Mechpara, and Habraghat in Rangpur. In the nineteenth century these four estates were separated from Rangpur and included in Goalpara” (Bal, 2000:160).

*zamindars* who controlled these markets, were free to extort high duties from these Garo traders from the hills, who were subjected to the worst type of exploitation (Bal, 2000:160).

*Zamindars* relation with the Garos and local peasants were not always peaceful. Even in the early colonial period *zamindars* enjoyed enough freedom in their revenue collection activities and they gradually had tried to increase their power and income by enhancing taxes that resulted recurrence of peasant revolts in the area. At one stage In 1774 Sherpur town was attacked by a group of Garos. Kirti Narayan, the then *zamindar* of Sherpur was killed by their arrow (Hossain, 1969:51). Finally, at the beginning of nineteenth century local peasants of Sherpur area took up their arms against the oppression of the *zamindar*. In 1824-25 and again in 1833, northern Mymensingh witnessed a number of peasants uprising, which is known in the history as *Paglai Dhum* or *Pagalponthi* movement. At the early stage, Safati led the movement, and then afterwards Tipu Pagla succeeded it. A battle was fought between the followers of Tipu and *zamindars* at *Gar Jaripa*. *Zamindars* were defeated in the battle and they fled away from Sherpur. Tipu then established his authority over the region and ruled over Sherpur for two years. Later he was defeated and captured by the British army in 1827. In the trial that followed he was imprisoned for life and died in jail. Disciples of Tipu again revolted under the leaderships of Gumanu Sarkar and Uzir Sarkar. Afterwards they again revolted under the leadership of Zanku Pathar and Debraj Pathar. This rebellion could not be suppressed effectively until the year 1882.

*Pagalpanthi* movement was described in the Mymensingh District Gazetteer (1978:37) as a Garo revolt against *zamindari* oppression. Though from the very beginning of the revolt a large number of Garo and Hajong took important part, this was not limited only to them. Various administrative reports of that time informed us that it was also participated by Hodi, Banai, Dalu, and Rajbangshi along with Muslim and Hindu peasant class. Indeed the movement was the manifestation of the peasant mind of that time against oppression of local *zamindars* and colonial rule. Bal contends:

“The occurrences tell us, for example, that the movement attracted peasant from various religious and ethnic backgrounds. The basic ground to join was the overall concern with exploitation and oppression, and there is no evidence of any ethnic or religious animosity. Cultural, linguistic, or religious differences did not stand in the way of organized peasant resistance. It was a class based revolt, a case of peasants rising up against the local landlords and the colonial state, with explicitly political and economic goals. Different ethnic and religious groups cooperated to resist economic exploitation. Never again did the region witness similar class-based uprisings. Instead, religion and ethnicity became increasingly important as mobilizing factors” (Bal, 2000. 166).

### **3.3 Present Ethnic Situation**

In the previous chapter an attempt has been made to describe briefly ethnic situation of Sherpur area in the past. It was also my contention that the process of culture contact among different ethnic groups shaped the nature of indigenous culture in the region; it was on one side marked by conflict and reconciliation, adjustment and integration, on the other side by a degree of maintenance of separate social and cultural boundaries among ethnic communities. A considerable number of ethnic communities lived in the

past, but present situation provides us information about the existence of a few and merger or non-existence of some others.

Table: 3

Information on Small Ethnic Population in Five Upazilas of Sherpur in 1991

Upazila	Sadar	Nalitabari	Jhenaigati	Nokla	Sribordi
Area	360.01 sq.km 139.00 sq m	327.61. sq.km 126.49 sq m	231.00 sq.km 89.19 sq m	174.80sq.km 67.49 sq m	270.34 sq.km 104.38sq m
Total Household and Population	H-80091 P-381419	H-42694 P-226332	H-30113 P-139732	H-33482 P-162952	H-47900 P-228194
Total Ethnic Household and Population	H-395 P-1862	H-1284 P-6665	H-1133 P-5352	H-112 P-523	H-452 P-1939
Number of Ward/Union in which ethnic people lives	Ward-3(total3) Union-13 (Total 13)	U-7(Total 7)	U-4(total 4)	U-9(total 9)	U-10(total 10)
Number of Mouzas in which ethnic people lives	Mohallah26 (total 42) Mouza 51(total106)	Mouza-74 (Total 108)	Mouza-46 (total 75)	Mouza-44 (total 88)	Mouza-49 (Total 81)

Source: Bangladesh Population Census, 1991, BBS

Table-3 shows the presence of small ethnic population in all 43 union and five thanas of the district. Out of total 458 *mouzas* they are found in 264 *mouzas*. Numbers of them are highest in Nalitabari<sup>36</sup> and lowest in Nakla. Jhenaigati is the second. But the census of 1991 does not exactly inform us about how many small ethnic groups lived in Sherpur, rather, the census

<sup>36</sup> It should be noted here that Nalitabari is one of the oldest *thanas* of the region. It was declared as *thana* in 2 October, 1888. At present it is the second largest Upazila of Sherpur district in respect of area. Nokla and Jhenaigati were previously under Nalitabari, they came into existence as separate administrative units on the 15 July 1975 and 12 November, 1992 respectively.



listed ethnic people under the category “tribal”. In fact the ethnic population might be more than the figure given in the census report<sup>37</sup>.

There are reasons for supposing so. It is observed that the ethnic people who are converted to Christianity are often listed in the official documents under the category of “Christian”, while those who use Bangali names similar to typical Hindu names are often grouped under the category “Hindu”. In both cases, ethnic people are excluded from the groups where they belong to. (Khaleque, 1995:12)<sup>38</sup>.

The partition of 1947 was one the most significant events of the region. After the partition ethnic communities of Mymensingh areas were confronted with a new situation. Partition ended partially exclusion<sup>39</sup> of the boarder area and with the patronage of the government Bangali Muslim

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<sup>37</sup> According to Khaleque (1992) who did Ph.D research on the Garos of Madhupur Garh of Tangail district, the Garo population of that area was 25000, whereas the Garo population of the whole Tangail district was 2112 according to the 1991 census report (Khaleque, 1995:13). The ethnic population of Jhenaigati thana of Sherpur was 5352 in 1991 census, whereas a survey conducted by SEHD in 1997 counted them at 7356. (SEHD, 2000:7).

<sup>38</sup> The problem of the census is that, the people having no adequate knowledge about the ethnic people and their ethnic, religious and linguistic background are often carrying it out in the local level. To some census enumerators it often appears difficult to distinguish one ethnic people from another, as religious and cultural differences among them are not always sharp. As a result in most cases, ethnic people are being counted considering physical affinities that sometimes lead to serious confusions. For example, in the 1901 census Koch and Rajbongsi, these two separate groups were listed as the same people. Similarly Bangsi or Rajbongsi, and Tipra or Tripura, who are really the same people, have been listed in the 1991 census as separate groups.

<sup>39</sup> In 1936 British colonial government declared some areas of Garo and Hajong inhabitation in Mymensingh as Partially Excluded Areas (PEA). The area spread over six interlinked thanas of Mymensingh, namely, Srebordi, Nalitabari, Haluaghat, Phulpur, Durgapur, Kolmakandha. The area inhabited by Garos and Hajongs was treated as partially excluded area, because some set of special laws and regulations were in operation there, for the betterment of the backward tribal people (Bangladesh District Gazeteers Mymensingh, 1978:57).

refugees who came from India started to move in the areas of ethnic habitation. Being worried of a new situation a few ethnic people left for India immediately before or after partition. Partition also affected the lives of Garos profoundly, as overnight they became a small minority in a Muslim dominated country. According to the 1951 census, of the almost 300,000 Garos, only some 40,000 Garos were living in the lowlands of the northernmost portion of Mymensingh district. These Garos had been separated from the Garos of India by the newly established international boarder (Bal, 2000:177). Rehabilitation of the refugees started just after the violent repression of Hajong movement in 1950 when many Hajongs left for India. But exodus of ethnic people mainly Hajongs largely happened during the year of 1964. In that year Indian government began to evict Bangali Muslim immigrants from Assam who had been living there for many generations. As a result "at the beginning of 1964, northern Mymensingh witnessed a sudden influx of Bengalis. Bengali refugees from Assam followed by Bengalis from places like Gaforgaon, Trisal, Kishorganj and Nandail invaded the area. The inflow started in 1963 but dramatically increased in 1964, when South Asia witnessed new outbursts of communal violence. In the wake of these riots, East Pakistan experienced the arrival of at lest 800,000 Indian Muslims, who came mainly from West Bengal, and another 540,000 Muslim refugees from West Bengal, Tripura, and Assam in December of that year" (Bal, 2000:184). Worst sufferers of the riot were not Garos but small Hindu tribes; Hajongs, Dalus, and Banais. The Hajongs, in particular, are said to be the worst victims of the violence. As a result, most of the Hajongs left their home and took refuge in India. Only few of them came back later. The influx of Bangalis and following violence committed with neighboring ethnic communities by a section of refugees frightened

Garos. They did also suffer from theft and intimidation. Being felt unsecured and doubtful about their future Garos also started to flee. Most of the Garos lived only few kilometers from the border, and a few families began to flee to the north. This only increased insecurity and isolation of those left behind, and larger groups began to leave. The most severe Mandi displacements said to have occurred in the area around Haluaghat, where within one day almost all the Garo villagers were left (Burling, 1997:67, Bal, 2000:185).

But Garos living in the boarder areas of Sherpur were not directly affected by the communal disturbances. In the wake of tension most of the Hajongs left their villages and a large number of refugees arrived from Assam, and also from different parts of Mymensingh. Although violence was not inflicted directly on the Garos, they suffered from insecurity and fear with the influx of Bangalis in their villages. In spite of that, from the bordering plains of Jhenaigati only a few Garos migrated during the period of turmoil. Government officials and Missionary leaders persuaded them to stay. Particularly in Mariamnagar area Mission was vigilant all the time and played a significant role in the protection of them. Security forces were deployed for maintaining peace in the area. Repeated requests were made by the Government through microphone and othe means in the border belts to facilitate coming back of them who had fled to India in the wake of communal tension. When law and order was finally reestablished, only a few Hajongs returned to their homes. Most of them stayed in India. Their houses and lands remained deserted. Bangali Muslim refugees were rehabilitated in those vacant areas. Most of the Garos who left out of panic came back to their homes and experienced a new situation of living side by side with rehabilitated Bangali Muslims in their villages. Few did not return and sold

their farmland and houses to the immigrants. Which is why, at present absolute Garo villages or small ethnic villages can hardly be found in the district.

Garos and other small ethnic community people had played significant role in the War of Bangladesh liberation in 1971. There were many valiant freedom fighters among them. This time they also suffered much, and their sufferings were no less than their Bangali neighbors. To save themselves from the atrocities of Pakistani occupation forces they took refuge in groups in India along with millions of Bangalis from every corner of the warring country. From the refugee camps, a large number of Garos were recruited in the *Muktibahini* (Freedom Fighter) and fought along with Bangalis against Pakistani forces. After the attack of Pakistani occupation forces in boarder areas, Garos also became the victim of destruction. As soon as the Garos and other ethnic communities fled, Pakistani army and their collaborators plundered their houses. This kind of atrocities and plundering in Sherpur started immediately after the arrival of Pakistani forces in Sherpur town. After the victory of Bangladesh on 16 December 1971, most of the Garos returned to their homes. They were to start afresh as all of their valuables, including furniture and utensils were looted from the houses. Many Garos described to me sad stories about how their houses were looted in 1971 by the Pakistanis and their native associates. A few of them, who opted to stay in the Garo Hills, sold their agricultural lands and homesteads to non-tribal people. Few ethnic people mainly Garos had left to India after the coup of August 15, 1975. This situation once again created tension in the boarder areas. "While this was a less turbulent period in Mandi history than 1964 or

1971, it added to the people's sense of unrest and insecurity" (Burling, 1997:71).

Indeed 1964, 1971, and 1975 were significant and traumatic years in the history of small ethnic people of Sherpur as well as north Mymensingh area. During these years they confronted with some unwarranted situation, which ultimately changed the character of the ethnic population of north Mymensingh region. Thus, the proportion of non-tribal people living in what had once been the purely tribal area of Sherpur increased. Burling observed:

"The years that followed the first riot changed the character of the population of north Mymensingh. Some areas that once were almost exclusively Mandi now have a majority of non-Mandis. Everywhere there is a substantial and growing population of Bengalis. Land continues, slowly but steadily, to be lost by Mandis and taken over by Bengalis. A few individuals, a few families, continue to walk across the border seeking refuge in India, but most people stay. This, after all is, home" (1997:73)

### 3.4 Jhenaigati Upazila

Jhenaigati is the smallest Upazila of Sherpur district in respect of population. It is located about 20 km north to Sherpur town. It occupies an area of 231.00 sq.km including 32.14 sq.km forest areas. It is bounded on the north by Meghalaya (India), on the east by Nalitabari Upazila, on the south by Sherpur Sadar Upazila, on the west by Sribordi Upazila. It is comprised of 4 unions, 75 *mouzas*<sup>40</sup> and 87 *villages*<sup>41</sup> According to the census of 1991 total

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<sup>40</sup> A revenue village with a jurisdiction list number and defined area is called *mouza*. It may be populated or depopulated (Bangladesh Population Census, 1991, BBS, 1995: 5).

<sup>41</sup> Smallest geographic area of rural area that is known to the people as village. A village may be same as *mouza* or there may be more than one village in a *mouza*. A village is always populated (Bangladesh Population Census, 1991, BBS, 1995: 5).

population of the area is 139732 of them Muslim 130462, Hindu 5605, Christian 3429, and tribal 5352.

Nothing is definitely known about the origin of the name *Jhenaigati*. It is said that before a half century, the present area was a deep forest where since evening innumerable *jhi-jhi* (crickets) insects used to make humming sound. Since then the area was known as *Jhenaigati*. Some are in the opinion that huge quantities of oysters (*Jhinuk*) were available in the rivers, canal and *beels* (marsh) of this area. The Koches used to collect these oysters and stringing together (*Gathe*) made garlands with these *Jhinuks*. In course of time the area became known as *Jhenaigati* with some phonetic change of the words *Jhinuk* and *Ghatha* (BBS, 1995:9).

At present, Jhenaigati is much known for the unique tourist spot *Gajni Abakash Kendra* (Gajni Leisure Center), located 13 km north to the Upazila head quarter and close to the borderline which separates Sherpur from Garo Hills. Surrounded by *Gajari* (shaal) forest and small hills, this beautiful gift of nature attracts huge number of nature lovers round the year. Especially in the winter season hundreds of people visits *Gajni* every day. From the lofty tower of *Gajni* one can easily see the panoramic view of Tura peak of the Garo Hills. Basically *Gajni* is the name of a Garo village, which is divided in to two parts; *Baro Gajni* and *Choto Gajni*. Garo inhabitants of these two parts are also separated into two Christian denominations; *Baro Gajni* by Baptist Garos and *Choto Gajni* by Catholic Garos. Few Garos are found living inside the leisure center also.

*Rangtia Pahar* (Rangtia Hill) is located three kilometers north to the Upazila Hq. *Garokona* and *Haldigram* are two bordering villages of Rangtia area. *Sisingpara* BSF (Boarder Security Force) camp of India is close to those two villages. *Sandhakura* is another bordering village. Tura hill can also be seen from these three places.

Elderly people told me that some 50/60 years back most of the areas of Jhenaigati were covered with forests and shrubs. General people were afraid of going to the northern and eastern sides from Jhenaigati *bazaar* (market). The people of small ethnic communities such as Garo, Hajong, Koch, Rajbanshi, Dalu and others inhabited the area. At that time Jhenaigati *bazaar* (then known as Ghosgaon) was the main market of the locality. There was a pig market in its corner. The people of different small ethnic groups, mainly Garos, also attended the market to trade their products and to buy necessary household articles. Generally, they used to visit market in groups with their goods.

In the afternoon people were afraid of walking since surrounding areas were almost deserted. There was no road communication except few walkways. Even before noontime it was difficult to walk because of huge forest cover. On the other hand, there also existed fear of wild elephants and other animals. Now it takes only fifteen minutes to reach *Gajni* through *pucca* road, while it was troublesome and adventurous during that period. At that time surrounding areas mostly in the north and north-east of Jhenaigati *bazaar* and bordering plains were inhabited by ethnic communities such as Garo, Hajong, Koch, Rajbanshi, Dalu, Banai, Hodi etc. It is said that most of them lived in the present Nolkura Union area. Migration of Bangali Muslims to those areas started mainly in the fifties of last century. Great exodus of

people from both sides of India and Bangladesh happened during the communal tension of 1964, when most of the Hajongs along with a large number Garos from the area fled to India. Bangali Muslim refugees coming from Assam had settled in those areas of Jhenaigati that once were almost exclusively inhabited by small ethnic communities. These Muslim villagers even today call themselves refugee without hesitation. One of my informants told me:

I was only 14 years old in 1964. Our family lived at Darang District of Assam. We entered Bangladesh through Lalmonirhat boarder and arrived at Jhenaigati. We had been settled in Manikkura village by the government in those places deserted by Hajongs. At that time few Muslims lived in Manikkura, Sandhakura and Haldhigram villages. Not only that Bangali Muslims arrived here from Assam, many people also came here from different places of Mymensingh, Jamalpur, Dhaka, Tangail, Noakhali, Norsingdhi and other places.

Jhenaigati is called the storehouse of natural resources. Hilly land of *Rangtia* contains good deposit of stones. The indiscriminate extraction of stones from the area is now posing a serious threat to environment. Silica sand has been found during excavation at the riverbank of *Someswari*. It is said that better quality glasses could be made of silica sand.

Although rich in natural resources most people of the area are poor. Flash floods, excessive rain and droughts are common natural hazards faced by them every year. Agriculture is the main occupation of the people and rice is the main crop. A good number of rice mills are operative in the area since rice harvests have always been plentiful. Except this, no other industry is located in the area. Extraction of sand and stones and carpentry are major



business of the area. Because of the presence of rivers, canals and *beels* many people depend for their livelihood on fishing. Garo Hills have long been famous for elephants. Attack of wild elephants from Garo Hills is always a major problem faced by bordering villagers. During the time of harvest herds of elephants frequently come down to the villages and damage crops and houses. People in the area are almost helpless in the face of attack of elephants.

Very recently an incident of attack by wild elephants happened at the frontier villages of Jhenaigati. Locals said that a herd of 60-65 wild elephants came from the Garo Hills of the Indian state Meghalaya in the afternoon of the 10 November 2005 and damaged paddy fields at Haldigram, Halchati, Ghandhigao, and Nokshi and Rangtia villages. About 4000 to 5000 villagers drove away the ramping animals. On the following morning the wild elephants came again to Haldigram and attacked the villagers. Three people were killed on the spot leaving 20 others injured in the attack.

In terms of cultural diversity Jhenaigati is a unique example. In spite of the fact that the number of small ethnic population decreased due to some traumatic events in the past, the area is the major concentration of the small ethnic people in the district. The SEHD survey in 1997, counted their population at 7356 (Table-4). The small ethnic groups in the Upazila are Garos (47.70%), Koches (23.15%), Hajongs (4.95%) and Rajbangshis/Bangshis (24.20%).

Table-4

## Distribution of Small Ethnic Population in Jhenaigati

Ethnic group	Households	Population	Remarks
Garos	741	3509(47.70%),	Male: 3722 Female: 3634
Bangshi	426	1780(24.20%)	
Koch	386	1703(23.15%),	
Hajong	87	364(4.95%)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>1640</b>	<b>7356</b>	

Source: SEHD, 2000: 45

Socio-economic condition of the Garos of Jhenaigati is better compared to the people of other small ethnic communities. Almost all Garos of the area are now Christian, and mainly divided into two denominations: Baptist and Catholic. Catholics are the majority. On the other hand Hajong, Koch, Bangshi communities are Hindus. Garos receive assistance from different sources, particularly from Christian communities. Their literacy level is also high compared to Bangali and other communities.

At present Garos are living mainly in the following villages of Jhenaigati:

Dudnoi, East Gajarikura, West Gajarikura, Sarakpara, Bhatpara, Protapnagar, Bharua, Baruamari, Sandhakura, Deflai, Baibadha, Jarultala, Shalchura, Bhaluka, Nakshi, Bakakura, Ghandhigaon, Gajni, Dhansail .

### 3.5. Topography of the Upazila

Major rivers passing through Jhenaigati are Moharishi, Someswari, and Malijhee. There are two other small rivers named Ranjanjora and Shiljora. Apart from rivers mentioned above, there are few other canals; most of them remain filled throughout the year. Originated from Garo hills and flowing over two bordering villages to the north Haldigram and Gomra, the

Moharashi river travels over two other villages Fakrabad and Nolkura, and then joins with Someswari to the south near Bagadubi. Someswari has its origin in Garo hills. It comes down to Jhenaigati passing through Balijhuri of Sribordi upazila. Again these two rivers meet Malijhee in the southeast near Tinani Bridge. Malijhee then falls to Bhamaputra to the south of Sherpur.

Economically, Maharishi and Someswari are two most important rivers and the influence of them is tremendous on agriculture. They carry both curse and blessings for common people. Water of these two rivers is mainly used for irrigation in the area, which farmers of surrounding areas use for harvesting crops. Generally farmers build dam in different parts of the rivers to restrain water and use low lift pump for the purpose of irrigation. In the process *Boro* (a kind of paddy which is harvested in April) crops have been cultivated in about 3000 hectors of agricultural land of the Upazila.

In the monsoon time, flash flood is a common natural hazard in the area. Flash flood is caused due to excessive rainfall in Bangladesh and adjacent areas of Garo Hills of Meghalaya (India). It submerges rivers and plain areas all together. Depending on the degree of heavy rainfall it could occur three times a year. Early flash flood occurs in May-June, mid time flash flood in July and August, while late flash flood usually comes in September and October. It comes down from the hills with huge sands and when flood water is receded most of land remains covered with sands. It damages huge quantity of crops. In the dry seasons water level goes below and a large part of cultivable land remains fallow. Rivers and canals also remain almost dry and people engage themselves in sand extraction activities.

Agriculture Extension Department, Sherpur has informed me that the whole of Bangladesh has been divided into 29 Agro-Ecological Zones. Some areas of Nokla, Sherpur Sadar and Sribordi of Sherpur district falls under Zone number 8 (Old Brahmaputra Aluminum Soil), some areas of Sadar, Nakla and Jhenaigati is under zone no. 9 (New Brahmaputra Aluminum Soil), Nalitabari and other parts of Jhenaigati are under zone no. 22 (Eastern Pediment Plains) and 29 (Northern and Eastern Hill Zones). Soil of Jhenaigati is slightly acidic and reddish in color. Soil types are clay loam, sandy loam, and silty loam. Land type is high, medium, and medium low and low. This area is moderately drought prone area. Since soil contains sand and stones, it is often difficult to install shallow or deep tube wells in the area. People face problems with stone not in the topsoil, rather, while boring inside, it creates problem in the deep soil. Even shallow tube wells are not operative during dry season when water level goes lower. This is considered as one of the major problems of the area. So, in the dry season farmers have to wait for rain. *Boro* crops can be ploughed at the riverbank areas, but cultivation of *T-Aus* (transplanted Aus) completely depends on rain. *T-Aus* is planted during the month of March and April when soil is ready after rain. After the harvest of *T-Aus*, farmers cultivate *T-Amon* (winter paddy).

Basically Jhenaigati is a rice and vegetable growing area, but it is also suitable for growing fruits, spices, as well as tea and rubber. Recently with the help of agriculture department farmers are trying to plough maize in some areas. Main fruits are mango, jackfruit, guava, olive, banana, papaya, lemon, liche etc.

Most of the People are poor. Landlessness is a serious concern for them. Dependence on non-farming activities are on the increase due to land scarcity and population pressure, although they still rely mainly on agriculture. People are mostly illiterate. In 1991 census literacy rate of all ages in the sub-district stands at 17.9%.

## Chapter: IV

### Socio-Economic Profile of the Study Village

*This chapter presents the results of an empirical analysis of the socio-economic condition of the study village. Primary focus is descriptive and contains a description of the location, physical environment, transportation system, population and household characteristics of three ethnic communities of Mandigaon village. Data used here are the outcome of a household census conducted by the author in the village. Historical documents, oral histories, retrospective interviewing and case studies are also used to understand present circumstances of social composition in the village.*

#### 4.1. Location

The village Mandigaon is located in the Nolkura Union of Jhenaigati Upazila (Sub-district) of Sherpur district. It is about three kilometers away from Upazila headquarter. The village is bounded on the south by villages Dudnoi and Bonkhali, on the west by the Maharishi river, on the north by village Gajarikura, on the northeast by village Bharua, on the southwest by villages Bonkhali and Shalchura. Mandigaon is a *mouza* and a village at the same time. There is no other village that falls under this *mouza*.

#### 4.2. Physical Environment

The village has a total area of 162.4 hectors, among them total cultivable land is 144h., one crop land 4h., two crops land 120h., and three crops land 20h. Total land under irrigation is 140h., excluded from irrigation is 4h. Main crops are Boro, T- Aus and T-Amon, main vegetables are cucumber, potato, bringal, jinga, pumpkins and guards of various kinds. Common fruits are guava, mango, jackfruit, olive, banana, papaya, lemon, liche etc. Huge quantities of beans are also produced every year in the area. But Garos are

found less interested in bean production. Furthermore, cultivation of maize has been introduced in the area recently with the help of local agriculture department. Few Garos are seen engaged in this new endeavor.

The village falls under 22 Agro-Ecological Zone. Soil types are clay loam and sand loam and land types are high, medium and medium low. Because of slight elevation of land the village area remains flood free. During the time of November 2004 a severe flash flood occurred, which damaged huge crops in Jhenaigati and some other parts of the district but Mandigaon was safe because of its natural advantage. There is only one deep tube well in the mission. The mission installed another shallow tubewell earlier and it is now out of order. During dry season villagers mainly depend on rain water and water of Maharashi River. Maharashi runs along the western side of the village. During the dry season it loses navigability and remains almost dry. A thin course of spring water flows down from the hills and farmers store this water by making ditches in different parts of the river. They store spring water throughout the night and in the morning they start lifting water by low lift pumps for irrigation. In this way water can be lifted till noon, then again farmers have to wait for the next morning. Three crops can be harvested every year from the riverside agricultural land of the village. The west portion of the village is exclusively inhabited by Muslims, although Garos own most of the agricultural lands of that side. Garo, Hajong and some Bangali families are found living at the easternmost part of the village. In between lie vast tracts of agricultural land that separates Garos from most of the Bangali Muslims of the village. Due to scarcity of water few farmlands located in the middle and eastern part of the village remain uncultivated during dry season. In spite of that, in some places Garo and Hajong farmers

cultivate crops in the dry seasons using both rain water and deep tubewell water from the Mission. Long before, when people had settled in the area, no doubt, sufficient forest cover existed there. But in course of time forest area shrank with the pressure of population and increasing demand of cultivable land.

### 4.3 Transportation System

In the recent years road communication in the rural areas of Bangladesh improved tremendously. Most of the important rural areas are now well connected by *Pucca* (paved/melted) road with growth centers or economically important places. The study area also has well road infrastructure facilities with Jhenaigati Upazila headquarter. Main transportation route from Jhenaigati to Mandigaon is *Jhenaigati-Gobindaganj* road. It runs to the east of Upazila headquarter, and after two Km. it is connected to the north with the village through an interior pucca road, called *Dudnai-Mariamnagar* road, which ends just near the gate of Mariamnagar Mission. Different types of motor vehicles, even small size trucks can be driven on this *pucca* road. There are few other *katcha* (mud road) roads and trails leading to different directions inside the village. For going places outside villages, people of this area, generally walk or use rickshaw, bicycle or motorcycle according to their ability. For the purpose of transportations of goods and agricultural products to markets people generally use rickshaw van, or *Nasiman* (Basically power tiller, often seen as a vehicle carrying people or goods in the rural areas). Bullock carts are also used for this purpose.



#### **4.4 Population and Ethnic Composition**

Mandigaon has a mixed population of three ethnic groups: Bangali Muslim, Garo and Hajong. At present, Bangali Muslims are the majority followed by Garo and Hajong. First census of Pakistan was conducted in 1951 where total population of the village found 390 in 60 households (Census of Pakistan, 1951:117). In 1961 census population and household in the village counted at 258 and 50 respectively (Population Census of Pakistan, 1961: V-76). In the census of 1974 population of the village was enumerated 532 in 88 households (BBS, 1977:35). In these above mentioned three censuses tribal population of the villages were not counted separately. However, in the census of 1981 and 1991 we find village based-list of tribal/ ethnic population. According to 1981 census the total population of the village was 573 in 99 households, where Bangali Muslim population was 159 in 34 households and tribal population was 387 in 62 households (BBS, 1983: 62). According to 1991 census, the total population of the village was 829 in 149 households, where Muslim population and population with tribal ethnicity were counted at 325 in 71 households and 504 in 78 households respectively (BBS, 1995:115). In 1997, Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) conducted a survey with a view to showing discrepancies and undercounting the ethnic communities in the official census. SEHD listed Mandigaon and Mariamnagar as two separate villages of Jhenaigati thana and counted 481 ethnic people in 85 households there (SEHD, 2000:43). 1991 census and SEHD survey do not differ much from each other regarding counting of household and population in the village, although SEHD survey counted less ethnic minority population than enumerated in 1991 official census. Table-5 presents findings of a recent census conducted by the researcher in this regard. It appears from the table

that number of households along with population in the village has increased. Among 195 households enumerated in the village, Bangali Muslims comprised of 110 households, which constitute 56.41% of the total households, while number of Garo and Hajong households are 74 (37.95%) 11(5.64%) respectively. Total number of population in the village is 1035. Among them 497 (48.01%) are Bangali Muslims, 494 (47.72%) are Garos, and 44 (4.25%) are Hajongs. It appears from the Table-5 that number of Garos and Hajong households in the village remains almost same as the previous findings of SEHD, but population of them slightly increased. On the other hand number of Muslim households and population has increased substantially compared to 1991 census. Now Muslim population stands at 497, whereas, ethnic minority population (both Garo and Hajong) with a slight majority stands at 538. It appears from the above discussion that ethnic minority population as a proportion of the total population of the village has been decreasing over the time.

I was informed that, in the past, Mandigaon was absolutely a 'tribal' village and there was no Bangali (Muslim/Hindu) population. Only Hajong and Garo populated it. Hajongs were the majority and the size of Hajong population was much larger. Most of the Hajong left the village in several occasions mainly after the communal disturbances of 1964 and migrated to India. On the other hand Bangali Muslim refugees from Assam and other areas came in numbers and rehabilitated in Mandigaon and other neighboring villages (see chapter three). Study revealed that forefathers of about 50% Bangali Muslim households out of 110 households originally came from Assam or some other parts of India. Others had settled in the

village from different places of Bangladesh, such as Sherpur, Tangail, Jamalpur, Dinajpur, Gafargaon, Sribordi, Sarishabari etc.

Table: 5  
Distribution of Household and Population by Ethnicity in the Village

Ethnic group	Number of Household		Population	
	Household	Percent	Population	Percent
Bangali	110	(56.41%)	497	(48.01%)
Garo	74	(37.95%)	494	(47.72%)
Hajong	11	(5.64%)	44	(4.25%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	<b>(100%)</b>	<b>1035</b>	<b>(100%)</b>

Source: Field Census

Main concentration of the Bangali Muslim population is now in the western part of the village, while Garos are concentrated in the eastern part (see Map-4). A few Bangali Muslim households are also seen living near to them. Hajongs are living in a small *para* in the middle of the village surrounded by the Bangali Muslims.

#### 4.5 Religious Affiliation

Bangali Muslims form the largest religious group with 48.01% of the total population in the village; followed by Christian (47.63%) and Hindu (4.25%). All Garos of the village are Christian while all Hajongs are Hindu. Christian Garos in the area are divided mainly into two denominations: Catholic and Baptist. In Mandigaon, except one, all Garos are the followers of Catholicism (Table-6). With the passage of time traditional religion of the Garos known as *Sangsarek*, overruled by Christianity. At present, there is no *Sangsarek* Garo in the village. Conversion to Christianity in this area dates

back to early nineteenth century with the advent of missionary activities. The role of Mariamnagar Catholic Mission (See Chapter-V) is significant in this respect. Until today mission has religious and spiritual control over Garos of the village as well as other Catholic population in the area.

Table: 6  
Distribution of Population by Religion in the Village

Religious affiliation	Population	Percent
Muslim	497	(48.01%)
Hindu	44	(4.25%)
Catholic	493	(47.63%)
Baptist	1	(0.97%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>1035</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Field Census

#### 4.6 Gender and Age Composition

According to my field census (Table-7) the percentage of male and female in the village are 49.37% (511) and 50.63 % ( 524) respectively. Among Bangali Muslims, female constitutes 53.32%, which is higher than their male counter part. On the other hand, among Garo and Hajong number of male population is higher than females. Distribution of population by age shows almost a similar picture in all three ethnic groups. Table shows that about 50% of the population of the village, including males and females fall between the ages of 18-55. Number of people above 56 is found less compared to other age groups; they constitute 6.89% of the population. 43.57% of the population is under 17 years old; among those under 5 years are 12.95%

Table: 7

## Distribution of Population in the Village by Gender and Age

Age Group	Bangali Muslim		Garo		Hajong	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Up to 5 years	37	38	28	29	2	
6-17	79	85	77	68	5	3
18-35	67	98	90	87	7	8
36-55	39	33	41	38	6	6
56 above	18	10	19	17	4	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>232</b> (46.68%)	<b>265</b> (53.32%)	<b>255</b> (51.62%)	<b>239</b> (48.38%)	<b>24</b> (54.55%)	<b>20</b> (45.45%)

Source: Field Census

#### 4.7 Household Size and Family Type

According to Chant “Households mean different things to different people in different places, and there is growing debate on the desirability (or otherwise) of generating definitions which might be universally applicable” (1997:5). As Thorner and Ranadive (1992:153, quoted by Chant, 1997:5)) pointed out, household might just as readily be understood as kinship unit or economic unit than as housing unit. But the vast majority of censuses in developing countries define household as spatial unit, where members live in the same dwelling and share basic domestic and/or reproductive activities such as cooking and eating (ibid: 5).

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics<sup>42</sup> has defined household as the smallest unit of social institution. Almost all the socio-economic activities are being performed in the unit. It can be defined as dwelling unit where one or more persons live and eat together from the common cooking arrangements.

<sup>42</sup> Report of the Households Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2000, BBS.

Matrimonial or blood or both relations exist among most of the persons who reside in the dwelling. The Statistical Profile of Women in Bangladesh<sup>43</sup> define household in a general sense, is a “residential” group, i.e., a cluster or individuals who occupy a residence together. The basic criteria of a household are that the persons constitute the household “jointly occupy a common dwelling space, share principal meals and make a common provision for basic living needs”.

Table-8 shows that there is a wide variation between Bangali Muslim and Garo in respect of household size. Majority (50%) of Bangali Muslim households are composed of 2-4 members. 40.91% of them are composed of 5-7 members. Households above 8 members constitute only 7.27% of them. We find a different picture in case of the Garo households, where 24.32% are composed of 2-4 members, 41.89% are composed of 5-7 members and households above 8 members constitute 33.78% of them. It should be noted here that there is a wide gap between these two ethnic people in respect of household numbers, where number of Bangali Muslim households are 110, Garo households are 74. But number of Bangali Muslim and Garo population is almost same (BM: 497 Garo 494). It is evident from the table that household size of the Bangalis in the village is smaller compared to Garos. Average size of household members in the village is 5.3 whereas average of Bangali, Garo, and Hajong household size are 4.52, 6.72 and 4 respectively. Existence of greater number of large families among Garos is the manifestation of their strong family bond and kinship relations.

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<sup>43</sup> The Statistical Profile of Women in Bangladesh 2000, M/O Women & Children Affairs.

Table: 8

## Distribution of Household Size by Ethnicity in the Village

Family size	Bangali	Garo	Hajong	Total (%)
One member	2(1.82%)	x	2(18.18%)	4(2.05%)
2-4 member	55(50%)	18 (24.32%)	4(36.36%)	77(39.49%)
5-7 member	45(40.91)	31(41.89%)	5(45.45%)	81(41.54%)
8 and above	8(7.27%)	25(33.78%)	x	33(16.93%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>195</b>

Source: Field Census

Table-9 shows that a large percentage (66.15%) of households in the village is nuclear families. 33.85% families are joint families. Among Bangali Muslims 70.91% are nuclear families, while among Garos it is 58.99%. In all the three communities' number of nuclear families is more than joint families. The existence of large number of nuclear families has clearly indicated change in their traditional family organization. Traditionally Garo parents nominate one of the daughters to be the heiress who is known as *nokna*. In the older days it was obligatory for *nokna* to reside with her parents after marriage. On the other hand, non-heiress daughter establishes neolocal households after a probationary period of one or more years. But they now do not follow this rule strictly. In Mandigaon young couples are found to be more willing to live independently in a separate house near their parents. Even some parents are also seen interested to let their offsprings live separately so that they can establish themselves. Nevertheless, they maintain relations and extend mutual help with paternal families even after the establishment of separate households. Besides, for a period they remain in the same 'eating group'. In the present situation a village cannot give subsistence to all due to population pressure. Because of this economic

consideration many families move away to some distant places to find better prospect of living. These factors have changed their family attitude to a great extent showing a declining trend of joint families in their present household structure.

Table: 9

## Distribution of Households by Family Type in the Village

Family type	Bangali Muslim	Garos	Hajong	Total(%)
Nuclear	78(70.91%)	43(58.11%)	8(72.73%)	129(66.15%)
Joint	32(29.09%)	31((41.49%)	327.27%)	66(33.85%)
Total	110	74	11	195

Source: Field Census

#### 4.8 Literacy and Educational Attainment.

The United Nations defines literacy as the ability of a person to both read and write a short simple statement (Shyrock et al, 1976:182). But the definition of literacy was not uniform in different censuses of Bangladesh. For example, in the 1961 census literacy was defined as the ability of a person to read any language with understanding. This definition includes the persons who can read any clear print with understanding, whether he can write it or not. The 1974 census defines literacy as the ability to both read and write in any language. In 1981 census a person has been treated in line with international usages as literate if he /she can write a letter in any language (Statistical Profile of Women in Bangladesh 2002:155). In 1991 census, a person who is able to write a letter has been considered as literate. For the purpose of the present study literacy has been calculated for all ages in accordance with the definition of 1991 census and persons aged 7 years and over are considered.



In the 1991 census literacy (7 years and over) in Jhenaigati thana was calculated 17.9% for both sexes. But in Mandigaon it was found 44.5% (male 45.8%, female 43.4%), which was highest in the thana. My own census presents an impressive increase in literacy rate in the recent years. Table-10 shows that average literacy rate of all ages in the village is 66.76%. It is higher than present national level (45.3%). In the village literacy is the highest among (83.81%) Garos. Hajong community stands second in this respect as their percentage is 72.73%, while Bangali Muslims are behind them with a percentage of 49.29%.

Table: 10  
Literacy Rate by Ethnicity in the Village

Education level	Bangali Muslim	Garos	Hajong
Primary level (upto class V)	176	177	1
Class VI to SSC	68	190	29
HSC	1	19	2
Graduate	x	8	x
Masters	x	2	x
<b>Total</b>	<b>245(49.29%)</b>	<b>414(83.81%)</b>	<b>32(72.73%)</b>

Source: Field Census

This impressive increase in literacy rate among the Garos has resulted due to the location of Mariamnagar High School in the village. A number of GO, NGO initiatives have also played a part in this advancement. The school was established in 1969 as a junior High School by the Mission, which introduced formal education in the area.

Table-11 shows that number of students in the primary level is 241. Among them 165 are Garos, 66 are Bangali Muslims, and 10 are Hajongs. In the secondary level, it is 139, 73 and 10 respectively. In comparison, number of Garo student is more than others:

Table-11

Comparative Statement of Students by Religion in Mariamnagar Primary and High School (2005):

Level	Muslim		Christian		Hindu		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Primary(Upto V)	39	27	95	70	5	5	241
Secondary(VI-X)	42	31	67	72	5	5	222

Source: Mariamnagar High School

#### 4.9 Land Holding Size

Land has long been considered as the key resources in rural Bangladesh and a central factor in household's social status and economic strategies. Distribution of land ownership is clearly correlated with the incidence of poverty. It is estimated in different statistics that in Bangladesh about 60% of households are effectively landless. For the purpose of the present study a census carried out by the researcher reveals that 58.46% households are landless in the village. The percentage is almost similar compared to the national average. Findings projected in Table-12 show that in the village prevalence of landlessness is high among Muslims, which is 69.09%, while it is 54.55% and 43.24% among Hajongs and Garos respectively. Table shows that percentage of marginal households are almost same among the

three communities, but number of households with large land holding size (5.00+) are more among Garos than the Muslims (G: 10.41%, M: 1.82%). Their household size is also larger than average Bangali Muslims families.

There are many reasons behind this difference. The most important reason is that Bangali Muslims of the village were refugees or landless poor people. They were rehabilitated time to time, mainly in the sixties, in the deserted land of the Hajongs. During the time of settlement, these landsless refugee people were allotted small plots of land by the government for subsistence. Still they are poor in general and mostly depend on farming or non-farming wage labor. Their homesteads and agricultural lands have also been divided to the heirs in course of time. A few medium and large landowners are among them. They acquired farming and non-farming lands from ethnic minority people, mostly from Hajongs through purchase. They are better off people compared to others of their community. Besides them, outsiders also own some agricultural lands in the village.

Land holding size and family size have a significant correlation. In the village number of joint families is prevalent more among Garos than other communities. It is because, before the emergence of private property or individual ownership among the Garos, property was treated as communal or *a'king* land and was strictly impartible. Since, traditionally, ownership was vested to the heiress daughters, examples of transfer of property were a few. This is one of the reasons that Garo family size and households land holding size still remains larger than their neighbors.

I was informed that in the past, the Hajongs owned majority portion of the village land, and the Garos owned rest. There was a little forest area in the village. Almost all Hajongs of the village left in course of time in the face of

communal disturbances, threat and intimidation, leaving only a few. But majority of the Garos remained in the village, even after the influx of

Table: 12

## Distribution of Household by Land Holding Size in the Village

Size of Land Holdings (in acres)	Bangali Muslim		Garo		Hajong	
	No Homestead	13	11.82%	9	12.6%	3
Only Homestead and Upto 0.01-0.50	63	57.27%	23	31.08 %	3	27.27 %
<b>Landless</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>69.09%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>43.24</b> %	<b>6</b>	<b>54.55</b> %
0.51-1.00	16	14.55%	8	10.81 %	2	18.18 %
1.01-1.50	6	5.45%	8	10.81 %	x	x
<b>Marginal households</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>21.62</b> %	<b>2</b>	<b>18.18</b> %
1.51-2.50	7	6.36%	6	8.11%	2	18.18 %
2.51—5.00 and above	3	2.73%	12	16.22 %	1	x
<b>Medium households</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9.09%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>24.33</b> %	<b>3</b>	<b>27.27</b> %
<b>Large households 5.00 +</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1.82%</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>10.41</b> %	x	x

Source: Field Census

refugees came from Assam of India and landless poor people from different parts of the country. In the face of threats of grabbing by others, Garos of the village were able to protect their land and valuables. With the passage of

time, for economic or other reasons some farmland of the Garos have also been sold out to others.

The process of selling land owned by tribal people has some complications. Section 97 of the State Acquisition and Tenancy Act 1950 restricted transfer of aboriginal land to others without the permission of the Government. It is presumed that the act incorporated this provision to address the issue of land grabbing by a section of unscrupulous people in the way of intimidation, threat or of making false documents as well as to discourage tribal people's migration to India.

However, a large portion of Hajong land of the village is sold or transferred in the meantime. Among Garos, incidence of land transfer by selling is a few. Jhenaigati Upazila Sub-Register's office informed me that in Mandigaon *mouza*, from January to December 2004, 6 people have transferred their 2.75 acres of land; among them one case was happened between Bangali Muslims, another one case was between Bangali Muslim and Garo, other 4 cases were among Garos. From 1 January to 31 May number of cases of land transfer was 6, where 4 cases were among Bangali Muslims, 1 between Garos, and 1 between Garo and Bangali Muslim. This picture clearly indicates that incidence of land transfer among Garos is scanty, and transfer between Garo to Bangali Muslim is also negligible (Table-13).

Table-13

Incidence of Land Transfer in Mandigaon Mouza (in acres)

Period	Bangali Muslim to Bangali Muslim	Garo to Bangali Muslim	Garo to Garo	Bangali Muslim to Garo	Total
1 January to 31 December 2004	1(.20)	x	4(1.49)	1(1.06)	2.75
1 January to May 31 2005	4(1.89)	1(.25)	1(.60)	x	2.74

Source: Upazila Sub-Register Office, Jhenaigati

On the other hand significant changes have occurred in respect of land transfer to the heirs. Now a days, land tenure arrangement of the Garos has taken a new shape. Garo land in Mandigaon or other Garo villages of Sherpur are no longer considered as the common property of the *a'king*. Notion of *a'king* land still exists in Garo mind, but it has lost its significance under the new situation of economic and social prerogatives. Land is now considered as family or individual property and transmitted to daughters and sons following varied degree of options. Now male persons can acquire and dispose landed property at any time of their own accord. It has added a new dimension in the land tenural arrangements of the Garos. In course of time land owned by the Garos were also fragmented. Uneven distribution of land ownership and existence of large number of landless and marginal households among Garos could be considered as the manifestation of the process of change in their inheritance and land ownership pattern.

#### 4.10 Occupation and Income

In the rural areas, households are generally seen engaged in multiple economic activities. For example, where a member of a family works in office other members can do different type of jobs; agriculture, business, etc.

Rural people generally are poor, since they lack proper education and training. They have very limited scopes for salaried jobs. Economic opportunities are also limited in the rural areas. Situation of Mandigaon is not different from other remote rural areas of Bangladesh. Scope for employment is less and alternative income sources are limited in the village. Table-14 shows that in all three communities 31.28% of the households depend on only one income source, 37.95% have two income sources, 23.59% have three, and 7.18% have more than three income sources.

Table: 14  
Number of Income Sources of Households in the Village

No. of Income Sources	Households			Total (%)
	Muslim	Garo	Hajong	
One	41(37.27%)	17(22.97%)	3(27.27%)	61(31.28%)
Two	46(41.82%)	26(35.14%)	2(18.18%)	74(37.95%)
Three	17(15.45%)	25(33.78%)	4(36.36%)	46(23.59%)
More than three	6(5.45%)	6 (8.11%)	2(18.18%)	14(7.18%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>195</b>

Source: Field Census

Table-15 shows that agriculture is the main source of income of the villagers as usual. About 31.28% household is directly dependent on agriculture for their subsistence, and dependence on agriculture among three communities is almost same. In addition to that 15.90% household members of the village mainly rely on agricultural wage labor. This indicates that about half (47.18%) of the population of the village are engaged in agriculture and agriculture related activities. In the village day-laboring households constitute 8.72%. In addition, 7.18% are found working as transport workers and rickshaw pullers. Few families in the village can subsist on land property but others, who belong to poor and vulnerable group, are deprived

of land property. These sections of people are mostly found to be engaged in menial jobs such as day laborer, night guard, rickshaw puller, domestic servant etc. Such occupations sometimes are seasonal and depend on the availability of works. Cattle raising and poultry, fruit gardening and horticulture are in most cases alternative sources of income. Majority of the households have cow, pig, goat, chicken, duck, pigeon etc. But number of animals is far less than needed to be the main source of income of the households. Only one Bangali and two Garo households have been found whose main source of income comes from similar source. Few have taken fisheries as their alternative source of income. Few people are found working as teacher, carpenter etc. Few are living on charity.

Table-15  
Main Occupation of Households in the Village

Main Occupation/Income sources	Bangali	Garo	Hajong
Agriculture(including horticulture and share cropping)	34 (30.91%)	23 (31.08%)	4 (36.36%)
Agricultural wage labour	25 (22.73%)	7 (9.46%)	
Non Agricultural wage labour/day labour/house maid	7 (6.36%)	6 (8.11%)	2 (18.18%)
Small business/Shopkeeping	15 (13.64%)	4(5.40%)	1 (9.09%)
Service	5 (4.55%)	25 (33.78%)	4 (36.36%)
Cattle Raising /Poultry	1 (0.90%)	2 (2.70%)	
Transport worker/Rickshaw Puller	13(11.82%)	1 (1.35%)	
Teaching		2 (2.70%)	
Carpenter	1(0.90%)	1 (1.35%)	
Other (including charity)	9 (8.19%)	3 (4.05%)	
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>11</b>

Source: Field Census



Occupational distribution of the Garos differs substantially from the Bangalis. Finding indicates that dependence upon agriculture among Garos is less compared to other economic activities of them (Table-15). For instance, 40.54% of Garo households are farmers or farm workers, and, 47.30% households depend on variety of occupations such as, service, small business, teaching, cattle-raising and poultry, carpentry, forestry etc. Furthermore, few subsist on day laboring and few depend on charity. In comparison 53.64% Bangalis are found engaged in farming or farm related jobs. Apart from this, Bangalis are found engaged in different types of occupations, such as small business, shopkeeping, cloth vendor, and fertilizer dealer. 13.64% of the Bangali household's principle income source is business, while 5.40 % Garo households are seen dependent on business. 11.82% Bangalis are found working as transport workers and rickshaw pullers, while, among Garos only 1 rickshaw van puller is found. Agriculture wage labor is more prevalent among Bangalis (22.73%) than Garos (9.46%). This high percentage of day laboring households indicates the existence of high percentage of landless households among Bangalis.

The most striking difference exists between these two communities in service sector. For instances 36.45% Garo households principle income source is service, and a large number of Garo women are found employed in beauty parlor in Dhaka and Chittagong. On the other hand among Bangalis number of service holder is only a few (4.55%).

#### 4.11 GO and NGO Activities

Different Government departments and offices such as Agriculture, Health and Family Planning, Fisheries and Livestock, Youth Development, BRDB, Social Welfare and Cooperatives are found working in the area for the socio economic development of the people. Apart from other activities Youth Development, BRDB, Social Welfare and Cooperative departments and financial institution like Bangladesh Krishi Bank have their credit programs in the area.

Table-16  
NGO Activities in the Village

Name of the Organization	Main activities	No. of Beneficiaries	Remarks
World Vision	Primary health care and nutrition, education, tree plantation, poultry and cow rearing training etc.	209	
BRAC	Credit program, family planning, health and nutrition, education, agriculture and social forestry, poultry etc.	126	Provides micro-credits
Caritas	Credit program in agriculture, small business etc.	21	Provides micro-credits
CCULB	Credit program, agriculture small business, fisheries etc.	8	Provides micro-credits
Adibasi Unnayan Sangstha	Credit program in agriculture, cow and goat rearing, sanitation etc.	13	Provides micro-credits

Source: Field Census

Table-16 shows that Several NGOs are operating in the village for the economic uplift of the poor people. They are addressing issues such as, poverty alleviation, agricultural development, education, family planning, healthcare, nutrition, sanitation and environment etc. They also work in the fields of adult education, small infrastructure development, and relief and rehabilitation at the time of natural disaster. Indeed, they are trying to cut across all sectors of welfare and development needs. NGOs like BRAC, World Vision and Caritas are well known for their multifarious activities. Adibashi Unnayan Sangstha is local in character and covers only a few villages. Although World Vision, Caritas and CCULB cover poor people of all three communities in the village, they have special attention to the Garos. Except World Vision other NGOs are providing micro credits to run income-generating activities. Amounts of micro-credits vary from taka 1000 to 30000. Credits are provided for different types of activities, such as agricultural development, horticulture, small business, house building, repayment of land-mortgaged loans, fisheries, cow and goat rearing, poultry, dairy farms, installation of tube wells, treatment, even for foreign trips. They also give grants to the vulnerable people in some cases. I came to know from local NGO offices that loan repayment rates among ethnic minorities are 100%. World Vision has no credit program yet; instead, they supply education materials for the poor students and provide treatment for them when necessary. Furthermore, they have training program on primary health care and economic development for the sponsored child's mothers.

## Chapter: V

### Garos of the Mandigaon Village

*In the previous chapter, a comparative analysis is presented about the socio-economic condition of the people of three ethnic communities living in the study village. We have seen in the analysis that despite many similarities, the Garos of the village are different in many respects compared to other communities. Until recently, they have maintained a separate status in many areas of their lives, but the process of transformation continued and very gradual changes occurred in their economic pattern, social structure and kinship system with the influences of outside factors. This chapter particularly deals with the Garos of the study village and focuses on several aspects of their present socio-economic condition: kin-based clan organization, marriage, religion, education, occupation and income etc. It also analyses present condition of the Garos of the village who are living in Dhaka. Information presented here is the outcome of an intensive fieldwork conducted by the researcher. For the purpose of this study, household census, informal group meeting, open-ended interviewing, observation and case study methods are used.*

#### 5.1 Clan and Sub-Clan

We have seen in the discussions of chapter-II that kinship is the central aspect of Garo social organization. Until today, every occasions of Garo life are essentially associated with kinship networks, and a Garo, as a member of the community, is supposed to abide by the kinship principles. Mandigaon Garos are also organized by this unique kinship system. They are divided mainly into two kin-based exogamous groups: *Sangma* and *Marak*. There are a few *Momin* in the village. These groups (*chatchi*) have many sub-groups (*ma'chong*). A list of them is placed below:

Table: 17

## List of the Garo Ma'chongs in the Village

Sangma	Marak	Momin
Chiran	Mrong	Rema*
Hadima	Chambugong	Deoa*
Dafo	Nokrek	
Chisim	Raksam	
Hagidak	Azim	
Nengminja	Thigidi	
Mankhin	Rangsa	
Snal	Dibru	
Ruram	Richil*	
Areng	Simsang*	
Mree	Panthra	
Cisam	Majhi	
Rukho	Hajong	
Dalbot	Deo	
Hawee	Kubi	
Sku	Dibru	
Khoksi	Bonoari	
Ghari	Pattang	

Source: Field Census

\*In the above list, *ma'chongs* marked with one asterix have been found showing their affiliation with both *Sangma* and *Marak*.

The above list is prepared according to the affiliation expressed by the Garos of the village. However, it is still difficult to define these groups in a general sense as who actually belongs to which *chatchi*. There was confusion in the past; even today some intricacies exist in relating their kinship attachment with other groups. Playfair (1909: Appendix-A) has listed *Areng*, *Chisim*,

*Chisam*, *Jengcham* among *Marak*, while *Rema* and *Richil* among *Sangma*, and *Cheran* (*Chiran*) and *Dalbot* under both *Sangma* and *Momin*. On the other hand, Jengcham (1994:57-58) has listed *Chiran*, *Chisam*, *Jengcham* among *Sangma* and *Richil* among *Marak*. He has placed *Dalbot* under both *Sangma* and *Sira*, and *Hadima* under *Shira* clan. Mrong (1999:20-21) has also placed *Chiran* and *Chisam* under *Sangma*, and *Richil* under *Marak*, while he has placed *Rema* under *Momin*. According to him *Rangmothu* is one of the *ma'chongs* of *Sangma*, while Jengcham has considered *Rangmothu* among the *Maraks*. More examples of complication can be cited from among various *ma'chongs* of five exogamous kinship groups. For example, *Thigidis* are known as *Sangma*, but in Mandigaon they have expressed their alliance with *Maraks*, while in the adjacent village Dudnoi, they are associated with the *Sangmas*. Generally, *Richil* and *Areng* are known as *Maraks*, while in Mandigaon they are more likely to be with *Sangmas*. *Rema* and *Deoa* are usually considered as *Momins*, whereas in Mandigaon, they apparently seem to affiliate themselves with the *Maraks*. It seems that most of the *ma'chongs* are localized groups in nature, and their affiliation with other groups is flexible depending upon place and circumstances.

Majority of the Garos of the village belongs to *Chiran* of *Sangma* clan. *Chambugong* of *Marak* is the second largest *ma'chong* in the village followed by *Mrong*, *Raksam* and *Nokrek* of the same *chatchi*. Number of other *ma'chong* members is a few.

Table: 18  
Numerical Strength of Different Garo *Ma'chongs* in the Village

Name of ma'chong	Total Population	Percentage	Female	Male
Chiran	241	48.79	129	112
Chambugong	90	18.22	44	46
Mrong	62	12.55	30	32
Nokrek	27	5.47	8	19
Raksam	17	3.44	13	4
Simsang	11	2.23	3	8
Chisim	6	1.21	3	3
Dafo	6	1.21	2	4
Rema	6	1.21	1	5
Thgidi	5	1.01	1	4
Azim	3	0.61	1	2
Rangsa	2	0.20		2
Snal	1	0.20		1
Areng	1	0.20		1
Deo	1	0.20		1
Rukho	1	0.20		1
Ghari	1	0.20		1
Deoa	1	0.20		1
Dibru	1	0.20		1
Mankhin	1	0.20		1
Hajong	1	0.20		1
Marak*	6	1.21	3	3
Sangma*	3	0.61	1	2
Total	494		239	255

Source: Field Census

\*In the village, only six persons have taken their family name as Marak, while three as Sangma.

One may be puzzled with the examples of these localized variations. Yet their matrilineal kinship system is strictly unilineal. It assigns individual in one group only. One cannot be a member of different groups at a time. Descent groups are always related to mother's line. Taking mother's lineage name is another example of unilineal principle. All Garos of the village are familiar with mother's lineage name. There are few examples of deviation from this principle, especially among urban middle-class Garos, we can witness the tendency to name children after their fathers (Bal, 2000:95). However, I have found no one in the village who has taken father's family name.

## 5.2 Marriage

Marriage system of the Garos has been changed to a great extent in the present circumstances. It is manifested in their attitude towards choice of mates, inheritance, and in the observance of marriage ceremonies. Conversion to Christianity has worked as reasons for shift from many fundamental practices of *Sangsarek* time. Consequently, significant changes have occurred in their present marriage system. It is generally observed that in many societies religious practice and indigenous culture co-exists, even though it may create conflicting situation. It is true of Garos also where Christian practices and *sangsarek* customs still present side by side.

By religion, all Garos of Mandigaon are now Christian. Christianity has brought significant changes in their social, economic and religious life, and they have abandoned many ceremonies and customs of their traditional marriage system. With the passage of time, many aspects of traditional Garo culture have changed. Institutions like *Nokma*, *Kamal* (Priest) or *Nokpanthe* (Bachelors Dormitory) no longer exist among the Garos of Bangladesh. Due



to the influence of Christianity, age-old practice of “Bride groom capture” disappeared long before. “Mother-in-law marriage” and “Step-daughter marriage”, once practiced and existed amongst them, are now being discouraged for social, economic and psychological reasons. However, some of their older customs have been retained until today.

Table: 19  
Marriage among Garos of the Village

Status	Male	Percent	Female	percent	Total
Married	96	19.43	99	20.04	195
Unmarried	157	31.78	130	26.32	287
Widow			10	2.02	10
Widower	2	0.40			2
<b>Total</b>	<b>255</b>	<b>51.61</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>48.38</b>	<b>494</b>

*Source: Field Census*

Marriages among the Garos are being formalized in accordance with the Christian laws. Marriage ceremonies generally are held in the Mission. In special cases, Father of the Mission may visit the house of groom/bridegroom, and conduct the marriage ceremony there. During the period of 2000-2005, 22 marriages were accomplished in the Mariamnagar Mission.

Table: 20  
Year Wise Distribution of Marriage Accomplished in the Mission

year	Number
2000	3
2001	3
2002	3
2003	6
2004	6
2005	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>

*Source: Mariamnagar Mission*

According to tradition, *Do-sia*<sup>44</sup> was the principle form of marriage among them. A cock, one chicken, and some rice beer (*chu*) were necessary for the performance of *Do-sia* ceremony. This custom still exists among the *Sangsarek* Garos. Christian Garos also observe some customs of *Do-sia* marriage. Now-a-days Baptist Garos reject *chu* since it is not permitted by their religion. But Catholics are allowed to drink *chu*. In Mandigaon, during observance of marriage following the *Do-sia* tradition, Garos kill fowl, drink *chu* etc. Indeed, indigenous marriage culture of the Garos does not become extinct; it exists in different form in different time and place.

According to the custom, a widow must take permission of her deceased husband's *mahari* before her second marriage. To obtain permission she must visit her parents-in-laws house and offer them a feast, which includes cooked food such as chicken, *binni* (a variety of sticky and sweet rice) rice and *chu*. This custom is called *randhi mitchu*. Villagers translate this term as widow's tear. If the concerned *mahari* agrees with the proposal of second marriage, only then a widow can marry another man, otherwise not. On the other hand, when a widow marries a man without the permission of her dead husband's *mahari*, she loses all her claim over any property acquired by her dead husband. All such property would be vested with deceased husband's *mahari*.

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<sup>44</sup> C.D. Baldwin says that the principal form of marriage by all Garos is *Do'sia*. According to this custom some alcoholic drink (*chu* or rice beer), two chicken (small), and one large cock (*do'rasong*) are sacrificed. Only the cock is eaten up by the non-relations of the marriage parties. The chicken is roasted and eaten. In order to predict whether the wedded pair will be happy or otherwise, the entails of the cock are observed. That is to say, if the hooks at the end of the entails should be of equal size and form, the bright future of the wedded couple is ensured. The officiating priest strikes the bride and bridegroom with close fist three times on the back and thus the marriage is completed (Baldwin quoted by Marak 1985: 107).

During my fieldwork, I have found such a woman who had to observe all formalities of *randhi mitchu* before her second marriage. After the death of her husband, she decided to marry her deceased husband's mother's sister's son. To obtain permission in this regard she went to her parents in laws house in Mandigaon. She cooked *chu* and chicken for the close relatives of her first husband, and about 40 of them were invited to the occasion. When the feast was over, she approached them with her intention and lastly got consent form them for her second marriage. After the marriage, she left her natal village and came to Mandigaon to live with her new husband.

Now there is no single rule to select *nokna* of a family-- any daughter who is very likely to reside with her parents may be selected as *nokna*. With the passage of time and with the change in economic pattern new opportunities of outside employment have increased. As a result, young couples are becoming less interested to be a *nokna* or *nokrom*, and the number of such marriages has decreased substantially. In spite of that in Mandigaon, a few *nokna* marriages are found.

Among 155 couples, I have found 12 *nokna* marriages in the village, which is insignificant in number. Traditionally a husband for a *nokna* may be chosen from both her fathers and mother's side. A mother's brother's son or a father's sister's son is always preferred as *nokrom*. In case of non-availability of such spouse, a distant cross-cousin may be chosen for marriage.

Table: 21

## Nokna Marriage in the Village

Relation with Nokrom	Number
Father's Sister's Son	6
Father's Sister's Son (distant)	2
Mother's Brother's Son	3
Mother's Brother's Son (distant)	1
Total	12

Source: Field Census

It appears from the Table-21 that still the practice of cross-cousin marriage works in selection of husband for the *nokna*. In case, when a *nokrom* is not available from a cross-cousin, either close or distant, parents of *nokna* may choose *nokrom* from other *ma'chong* also. In Mandigaon, such an incident took place where a *nokrom* was selected from a different *ma'chong* other than the *ma'chong* of daughter's father. In this case, a *nokrom* was supposed to be provided from *Raksam* as her father originally belongs to that *mahari*. But her father's sister had no son, not even a distant relation was available in the locality. This prompted them to choose one boy from *Majhi ma'chong*, a sub clan of *Marak chatchi*. When parents of the *Majhi* boy were approached with the proposal of marriage, they wanted to know why a boy from *Majhi* was chosen instead of *Raksam*. Then her father's sister went to the house of the boy and requested his parents for giving consent to the proposal since she had no son to offer as a groom for her brother's daughter. Then the *Majhi mahari* agreed to provide *nokrom* for the daughter of *Raksam*.

There are some examples of traditionality. At present, replacement or *jik'gite* marriages is being discouraged in the community. According to the

custom, after the death of a *nokrom*, a replacement *nokrom* should be selected from the *mahari* of deceased husband. I have come across one of such marriages in the village; while being unable to get a suitable person of the same age of the widow, a sister's son of the deceased husband's was selected as a replacement for the continuation of family bond between the two *mahari*. After marriage, the man simultaneously became the husband of his uncle's wife and step-father of their children. The young man agreed to marry the widow with an intention that her small daughter (who was also her mother's brother's daughter) one time would be his second wife. But the daughter, when grown up, became aware of her future and showed reluctance to be co-wife of her mother's husband. Eventually, she fled away from the village to India and married another man there. This is one of the most talked about marriages of the village. Villagers take it as an exception, particularly, young Garos consider this sort of replacement marriage disgraceful.

In Mandigaon, few cases are found where Garo got married to Bangali Muslims, Bangali Hindus, or Bangali Christians. In the older days, these types of marriages were strictly prohibited. Sometimes the persons concerned were expelled from the community and their membership to the community was cancelled (Khaleque, 1984:234). They do not approve this type of marriage even today. Some Garos are of the opinion that marriage with a person outside of their community is tantamount to losing own identity, language, customs and tradition of the Garos. Many Garos think that these trends of spousal choice from outside their community might endanger their future survival and identity as a separate community, and very existence of their matrilineal kinship system. In Mandigaon, most of the

Garos expressed their reservations about such marriages. Even family members of the spouses, who are married outside their community, particularly with the Muslims, found not willing to discuss the matter with others. Inter-community marriages are a common phenomenon all over the world. While living in a place surrounded by different ethnic people, particularly mainstream Bangali Muslims, the Garos cannot avoid possibilities of inter-marriage with others. Some of the Garos view that this deviation should not be taken seriously, and should be considered in the light of present situation.

During my fieldwork, I have found 12 such cases where Garos are married to other community members (Table-12). Among them, eight Garos were married to Muslims, three to Hindus and one to a Christian. Seven Garo women got married to Muslim males while only one Muslim woman to a Garo male. Of all eight couples, six Garo women have left their natal village after the marriage with their husbands. However, they still maintain contact with their parents, and sometime send money to them. Only two women are now staying in the village. One of them resides in her natal house. Her husband, a businessman of Jhenaigati *bazaar*, usually visits her at night. Another marriage is patrilocal in nature, but now the wife stays in Mandigaon in a separate household. Her husband is an overseas employee in a middle-east country. Numbers of marriages with Hindus are three; two with Hindu girls and one with a boy. After the marriage, two male Garos, who got married to Hindu girls, left their village permanently. One of them now lives in Gazipur and another one in Dhaka. They do not keep any relation with their natal village. A Garo wife lives in Sherpur town with her Hindu husband. Both husband and wife maintain close contact with the

village. A marriage took place between a Garo girl and a Bangali Christian boy. Soon after the marriage, both husband and wife had left Mandigaon, but returned a few years later. Subsequently, the husband was once elected as the Chairman of the village council. Marriage with a Christian is accepted by the Garos since they consider it as a union within their own religion.

Table-22

## Marriage of the Garos with the People of Other Communities

Marriage	Number	Remark
Marriage with Bangali Muslim	8	One with a Muslim girl
Marriage with Bangali Hindu	3	Two with Hindu girl
Marriage with Bangali Christian	1	
Total	12	

Source: Field Census

In Mandigaon, a wide variation is found in the marriage system. Attitude towards inter-clan marriages seem more flexible, and socio-economic options are considered in a varied degree during selection of spouse. Economic status, education, family requirements, employment, perhaps are the most common factors considered during choice of mates. Psychological factors are also significant in this respect. In spite of this, matrilineal principles and kinship prerogatives are still dominant in the consideration of marriages among them.

Apart from some deviations, the trend of marriage among the Garos of Mandigaon is still exogamous in nature. *Chiran* is the majority among *Sangmas*, while *Chambugong*, *Mrong* and *Nokrek* are dominant *ma'chongs* among *Maraks*. During fieldwork, 155 couples of all ages are found among 74 households in the village. Out of them 36 (23.22%) marriages are

performed between *Chiran* and *Mrong*, 29 (18.71%) between *Chiran* and *Chambugong*, and 10 (6.45%) between *Chiran* and *Nokrek*, while 8 (5.16%) between *Chiran* and *Raksam*. Other inter-marriages among different *ma'chong* are insignificant in number; although together they constitute a considerable figure. Table-23 shows the distribution of marriages among different *ma'chongs*.

Table: 23  
Marriage between Different Garo *Ma'chongs* in the Village

Sl. No.	Ma'chong Name	No.of Marriage	Remark
1	Chiran-Mrong	36	
2.	Chiran- Chambugong	29	
3	Chiran-Nokrek	10	
4	Chiran-Raksam	8	
5	Chiran-Muslim***	6	
6	Chiran-Rema	4	Rema belongs to Momin clan. In the village they show their alliance with Marak. Yet, they are seen to established marriage unions with different <i>ma'chongs</i> of both Sangma and Marak.
7	Chiran-Cisim*	3	
8	Chiran-Simsung*	3	Simsang is generally known as a <i>ma'chong</i> of Sangma.
9	Chiran -Bolwari	3	
10	Chiran-Thigidi	2	
11	Chiran-Richil	1	
12	Chiran-Majhi	1	
13	Chiran-Chiran**	1	
14	Chiran-Deoa	1	
15	Chiran-Ghagra	1	
16	Chiran-Hajong	1	
17	Chiran-Rangsa	1	
18	Chiran- Kubi	1	
19	Chiran- Dibru	1	



20	Chiran-Hindu***	1	
21	Chiran-Christian***	1	
22	Chiran-Jengcham*	1	
23	Chiran-Azim	1	
24	Mrong-Sangma	1	
25	Mrong- Snal	1	
26	Mrong-Hawi	1	
27	Mrong-Sku	1	
28	Mrong-Khaksi	1	
29	Mrong-Areng*	1	
30	Mrong-Rema*	1	
31	Mrong Hindu***	1	
32	Chambugong-Cisim	3	
33	Chambugong-Dofo	2	
34	Chambugong-Sangma	2	
35	Chambugong-Muslim***	1	
36	Chambugong-Rukho	1	
37	Chambugong-Patang	1	
34	Chambugong-Ghari	1	
39	Chambugong-Simsang*	1	
40	Chambugong-Richil*	1	
41	Chambugong-Mankhin	1	
42	Nokrek-Muslim***	1	
43	Raksam-Rema	1	
44	Raksam-Rongma	1	
45	Chisim -Hindu***	1	

Source: Field Census

- \* Couples marked with one asterisk are the examples of marriage between two *ma'chongs* of a clan(*chatchi*).
- \*\* Couples marked with two asterisks are the examples of marriage within the same *ma'chong*
- \*\*\* Couples marked with three asterisks are the examples of inter-marriage with other community people.

Few examples of deviation from exogamous marriage rule are also observed in the village. Rule of clan exogamy is not strictly followed in the present circumstances, but marriage within same *ma'chong* is still prohibited. Instances of deviation observed in Mandigaon, mostly are in respect of clan endogamy. For example, both *Chambugong* and *Richil* belong to Marak clan. But in Mandigaon, instance of marriage between *Richil* and *Chambugong* is found. Some of the Garo writers include *Simsang* among the *Sangmas*. In Mandigaon, some *Simsang* have established marriage union with both *Sangma* and *Marak*. *Remas* of Mandigaon show their alliance with *Maraks*, they too have established marriage relations with different *ma'chongs* belong to both *Sangma* and *Marak*. There are many examples of such marriages in Garo society. It appears that they no longer take it as a breach; rather they tend to approve it in their kinship structure.

Only one example of marriage within a same *ma'chong* was found in the village, where a *Chiran* married to a *Chiran*. This was a love marriage that happened when both of them were employed in Pakistan. In the ancient days, concerned couples of this kind were not allowed to stay in the village. Sometimes death penalties were imposed. Even today, Garos take it as a serious violation of their kinship rule and call them *madong*. The community does not accept couples of this kind, and often it happens that they leave village under compulsion. After returning home from Pakistan, the couple of Mandigaon also had faced the problem of acceptance in the community, and they too left the village under constraints. However, attitude towards them has been changed. They often keep contact with parents and sometimes visit them. They now live in Dhaka. I have visited their house in Dhaka, and

found living in a rented apartment shared with other two Garo families. It means they are not isolated from their community.

Love marriages are now more often among them. This trend, no doubt, signifies changing attitudes of young Garos. There is, of course, rural urban variation; arranged marriages are more in numbers among older couples in the village, while city living young Garos seem more willing to select their partners by themselves.

### **5.3 Mariamnagar Mission and Christianity**

Missionary activities started in Mymensingh region at the early nineteenth century. At first Roman Catholics set up a base in Ranikhong area of Birisiri in Durgapur during the time of 1910-1913. Father Francis Wyss started "Biradaikuni Dharma Polliya" at Haluaghat in 1927. They carried out evangelization in Mariamnagar area until 1939. Father Francis Wyss and Brother Severin had preached Christianity in the villages of Mariamnagar by using various modes of transport--bullock-carts and bicycles etc. Immediately afterwards for the convenience of preaching they had built a tin shed house at "Dhrapani" village. Later on the house had been shifted to "Baoibadha". In 1937 with the approval of Bishop Crowley, Father Dominic Rosario of Biraidakuni Mission permanently established a Mission at Baoibadha. After the establishment of the Mission there, few Garos of the area had been converted to Christianity and number of them gradually increased. During the period from 1938-1950 numbers of Catholic population stood at 1000. In 1951 Father Charles J. young had shifted the Mission from Baoibadha to present Mandigaon village. In the same year, wife of late Mr. George Flannigan of Flannigan School Publishing Company

donated money for the construction of a church. After completion of the construction work, the church was named as “Church of Saint George” after her late husband. The Mission was renamed as Mariamnagar in 1952 following the name of Mariamnagar Mission at Agartala (India). This is the biggest Catholic Mission in Sherpur District. There is another Catholic Mission at Baromari of Nalitabari Upazila. Mariamnagar Mission has religious and spiritual control over 43 villages in Sherpur and Jamalpur district where Catholics live. A list of villages under Mission is given below:

Sherpur Sadar: Ilsherchar, Doberchar, Charshrepur, Kosba

Jhenaigati: Bhatpara, Baruamari, Dudnai, West Gajarikura, East Gajarikura, Sarakpara, Haldibata, Bharua, Jarultala, Sandhakura, Baibadha, Rangtia, Gomra, Shalchura, Nakshi, Deflai, Ghandhigaon, Protapnagar, Chapacura, Gajni, Dhansail, Bakakura, Towakocha.

Nalitabari: Baigarpara, Bandhadhra

Sribordi: Kharamora, Bailjhuri, Jhulgao, Dhalbari, Bablakona, Hariakona, Darcicono, Balchugree, Hativerkono.

Bakshiganj (Jamalpur): Digkono, Goragri, Sangnathpara, Balujuri, Garamara.

Total Catholic population under Mariamnagar Parish was counted at 7500 in 2001. At present Father Alex Rabanal is the Parish Priest. He arrived in Bangladesh from Philippines as an Engineer, and became father of the Mission in 1999. Including him 2 fathers, 12 sisters, 2 brothers, and 12 seminarians are now in the Mission. One health center, 19 primary schools, one high school, three hostels are being run by the Mission. After the establishment of Mariamnagar Mission in the village conversion has got momentum and subsequently all Garos of the village have embraced this

new religion. Meskanto Chiran was the first Garo convert to Catholicism from Mandigaon village. Catholics are less puritanical and far more tolerant than the Baptists are, such as in matters of drinking or sexual lapses of their adherents. Probably these attitudes of Catholicism attracted Garos in the area to join it in a huge numbers.

#### **5.4 Education of the Garos**

Garos were introduced to formal education almost hundred and fifty years back. It came with Christianity under the patronage of colonial administration. In the Mariamnagar area Christianity came with such package in the early nineteenth century. However, formal education was introduced to them when the Mission had established Mariamnagar Catholic Primary school and Mariamnagar Junior High school in the village in 1969. Over the years, the schools have been producing numbers literate and educated people. Along with Garos, other community people of the area have also been benefited with the schools.

Education program undertaken by the Mission in the area proved to be a far-reaching initiative. Its effects were direct on the socio-economic pattern of the Garos of the village as well as others of adjoining areas. With this, number of educated Garos has increased steadily. As a result, Garos of the village now have the highest percentage of literacy rate in Jhinagati.

Recently the Junior High School has obtained academic recognition for 4 years (01-01-2004 to 31-12-2007) from the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education, Dhaka. In the primary school number of students is 241 (Table-11). Among them number of Garo students is 165, where 95 is

male and 70 is female. On the other hand, number of students in the junior high School is 222 (Table-11). Among them number of Garo students is 139, with 69 male and 72 female students. A class-wise distribution of Garo male and female students in primary and secondary level is shown in Table-24 and Table-25. It clearly indicates that in the secondary level enrollment of Garo female students is more than males. This impressive data reveals that women are in a better position in terms of education. Although the school has been running under the governance of the Mission, NGOs like World Vision, Caritas under their education program supports students through special stipends/scholarship and financial assistance (admission fees, exam fees, yearly fees) and supply of education materials.

Table: 24  
Comparative Statement of Garo Students by Gender in Mariamnagar Primary School (2005)

Total Number of students in the school (Class wise)	Number of Garo Students		
	Male	Female	Total
Nursery	16	12	28
Class-I	18	12	30
Class-II	19	10	29
Class-III	16	13	29
Class-IV	14	14	28
Class-V	12	09	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>65</b>

Source: Mariamnagar High School

Table: 25

## Comparative Statement of Garo Students by Gender in Mariamnagar High School (2005)

Total Number of students in the school (Class wise)	Number of Garo Students		
	Male	Female	Total
Class-VI	18	21	39
Class-VII	20	14	34
Class-VIII	17	15	32
Class-IX	08	06	14
Class-X	04	16	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>139</b>

Source: Mariamnagar High School

### 5.5 Occupation and Income of the Garos

The principal income source of the Garos of the village is agriculture; 40.54 percent of Garo household mainly rely on agriculture for their subsistence (see Table-15). The workforce of the Garos is primarily made up of agricultural worker. Almost all the Garos living in the village are somehow associated with agricultural activities either as a farmer, who cultivates his own land, or as a sharecropper or as an agricultural laborer. However, dependence upon agriculture is gradually decreasing. Although Garos have limited scope for salaried jobs and technical works, a good number of them is coming out of the village and seeking non-farming jobs. Table-26 shows that 27.33 % ( 135) of total population of the Garos are engaged in non-farming occupations. Of them 55.56% (75) are males, and 44.44 % (60) are females. Other than agriculture, the most common occupation among them is service, which includes employment in different Government and NGO

offices, or in private enterprises. Findings show that 43 (31.86%) of total work force) Garo women are employed in the beauty parlors mainly in Dhaka and Chittagong; they represent a large number of their workforce employed outside the village. Another common occupation is the job of a guard or of a night guard. They represent 13.33% of the total workforce in the service sector. 10 out of 18 guards of the village are working in handloom mills in Sirajgang and Pabna districts, other employed in Dhaka in different factories, foreign missions, and private houses. 13 persons, both male and female are employed in different NGO offices as officials, staffs or fieldworkers. Most of them work in Caritas and World Vision, and a few in different regional and local NGO offices located in Mymensingh, Tangail and Jhenaigati. Number of school teachers is only 5(3.84%). Among them two male teachers teach in the Mariamnagar High School, one as Headmaster and the other is an assistant teacher, and three female teachers work in different non-government primary and satellite schools outside the village. Participation of the Garos in government service is negligible. I have found only two persons; one is serving in the Army, and the other one is in Bangladesh Rifles (BDR). A retired army personal is also found in the village. Mission runs one primary health center in their campus. One woman is employed there as a nurse. Other than her, no one in the village is found to have taken this profession elsewhere. Three persons, one male and two females are employed in the mission as cooks. An insignificant number of them are engaged in business. Number of businessman is only two, one deals with fertilizer, and another is a vegetable vendor. Garos of the village owns three shops in the village, of them two are grocery-cum tea stalls, and one is grocery-cum tailoring shop. Both husband and wife run these shops at the time of their convenience. Surprisingly, only 3 persons are found to be



working in garments. Two males work in clinics at Dhaka. Among others, one is found employed as a salesman in a cloth store, one in a hotel as a hotel boy and two in private houses as domestic help in Dhaka. Other types of occupation include carpenter, day laborer etc.

Table: 26

## Non-Farming Occupation of Garos in the Village

Major Occupation	Number		
	Male	Female	Total
Army	1		1
BDR	1		1
NGO Official/ Staff	9	4	13
Foreign farm/office	3		3
Mission	1	2	3
Guard/Night Guard/Security Guard	18		18
Driver	4		4
Shopkeeper	1	2	3
Teacher	2	3	5
Carpenter	2		2
Beauty Parlor		43	43
Nurse		1	1
Wage labor	16		16
Small business	2		2
Garments	1	2	3
Clinical staff	2		2
Peon	1		1
Oil Pump	1		1
Restaurant Boy	1		1
Salesperson	1		1
Cook/Domestic help	3	3	6
Others	5		5
Total	75(55.56%)	60(44.44%)	135

Source: Field Census

Table-26 shows an approximate number of Garos, who mainly depend on agricultural labor or wage labor. It is always difficult to make a number

about how many of them are engaged as agricultural laborer or wage laborer. Day laboring is not a permanent job and laborers are not employed through out the whole year. They may engage during different stages of agricultural cycle. Those who works as agricultural laborer, during off time or off season, they may find other jobs to maintain their families. Garo day laborers of the village are also engaged themselves in multiple types of manual jobs. In Mandigaon, sand extraction is one of the major income sources of the day laborers. It is a common event that every year Maharishi river is overflowed by flash flood water. When flood comes, it carries huge sand with the water, which is proved to be useful for construction work. I have observed, in the dry season many day laborers are engaged in sand extraction work from the waterless part of the Moharishi river. Besides, day laborers are often engaged in various other works such as earth cutting, house building, road maintenance etc. They belong to the landless group of people. Without drawing a poverty line in the way of calculating daily calorie intake, or in any measure of standard, it can be said that they belong to the group of absolute poors.

Garo women are now coming out of their domestic sphere in increased numbers and are seeking employment outside for their livelihood<sup>45</sup>. Both males and females constitute the workforce of the village. Men's participation in agricultural sector is predominant in Bangladesh. However, in the Garo society the picture is quite different as Garos have achieved a better gender role in their occupational structure. Both male and female

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<sup>45</sup> Majumder pointed out that among the Garos a woman taking up a job in an office is only a recent development. Even in the twenties of the present century it was considered improper for a woman to work in the office (1985:294).

Garos of the village are seen working in the agricultural fields at different stages of cultivation and harvests. On the other hand, labor force participation is almost equal in the formal sectors. In regard to the earning status of both the sexes, in Mandigaon, it seems that in service sector, women are earning more than their male counterparts. It happens because of the fact that a large numbers of Garo women of the village are employed in beauty parlors. Usually beauticians get better payment in return of their service and in comparison, they earn more than who are employed in lower service such as guard, driver or sales persons etc. A few male employees are better paid. Mandigaon women now have decades of experience as beauticians and in the most cases, it helps them to earn more.

### **5.6 Garos of Mandigaon in Dhaka**

It is difficult to ascertain about how many Garos from Mandigaon lives in Dhaka. Number of them has been increasing gradually and it is not an easy task to keep records of new arrivals. There exists another problem in counting them because of their different resident choice. In fact, all married Garos have two identities in respect of village of origin and in respect of village of residence. Their association with either of the one place depends mainly on post-marital residence choice. After marriage one can remain in his or her own village or may live in the village of spouse. In such a situation it is always difficult to ascertain their actual number other than counting them with the population of the village where they have been permanently affiliated as a son-in-law or a daughter-in-law. Nevertheless, whatever might be their actual number Garos live in Dhaka from Mandigaon guess that the number of them would be approximately around 150 or a few more. It is said that only a handful of them have come to Dhaka before

liberation in 1971. Most of them arrived later or in the recent past for the purpose of service and education. Among them I have interviewed 25 couples to have an idea about their present socio-economic condition and residence choice.

Garos of Mandigaon in Dhaka generally are poor. For them it is difficult to maintain, even a modest rented house in Dhaka. Workers or students without families may share a room or small apartment with others, but it is observed that poor Garo families also often share their apartments with other families. I have visited some of the houses, and found many of them are living in rented apartments sharing with two or three families depending upon their financial capacities. It has other implications also. Living with kinsmen in a place surrounded by other people, give them self-esteem of togetherness and courage, and at the time of necessities they could help each others by any means. They are amiable and considerate people. Garo women can easily co-exist with others. However, educated and better-employed Garos often live separately according to their economic condition.

Dhaka residing Garos of Mandigaon, whom I have interviewed are mostly found under the age of 40 years (Table-27). Females are mostly seen within the age group of 20-30 years, whereas majority of the males are within 30-40 years of age. Only two males are found above 40 years of age. It indicates a trend of migration of younger generation Garos to big cities in search of jobs.

Table: 27  
Age of the Garos of the Village living in Dhaka by Gender of Spouse

Age group	Male	Female	Remarks
20-30	9	20	
31-40	14	5	
41-50	2	x	
Total	25*	25	one husband died recently

Source: Field Study

Unemployment is a major problem in Bangladesh, and scopes of salaried works are limited for them who are not skilled or properly educated. All of my urban respondents are found literate, although most of them attained education only upto primary or mid secondary level. Numbers of person received higher degree are few. Only three graduates and one master's degree holder are found. Of them, two graduate person (husband and wife) work in NGO's in senior level positions. The only master degree holder is an M.A.LLB. He is an advocate of Supreme Court and his wife is also a graduate who happens to be a housewife.

Table: 28  
Education Level of the Garos of the Village living in Dhaka

Level	Male	Female	Remarks
V to VIII	13	19	All respondent are found literate
vcxzIX -X	5	3	
S.S.C	3	1	
H.S.C	2	x	
Graduate	1	2	
Masters	1	x	

Source: Field Study

Garos of Mandigaon are engaged in multiple types of occupation in Dhaka. A few of them works in NGO and Government offices, others are engaged in subordinate or inferior types of works, which include profession of night guard, hotel boy, cook and domestic help etc.. Garos are considered as sincere and trustworthy people and many of them find their jobs as guard/night guard in factories, offices and private houses. Some of them work for foreigners as cook or housemaids or servants, and a few in hotels and Chinese restaurants as Hotel boy or Table boy. Salesmanship is relatively a new profession for them. About 20 years back Burling observed that neither was there a single Mandi shopkeeper, nor was there a single Mandi who worked as an employee in someone else's shop (1997:237). I have visited a big readymade cloth store located at Dhanmondi, and found three Garo youths working there as salesmen. One of them is included as a respondent in my interview as he hails from Mandigaon from his wife's side. Other two salesmen are from Madhupur. Only a few Mandigaon people seem to have been with Government jobs<sup>46</sup>. Although many of the Garos of other places have been in nursing profession since long, surprisingly, Garos of Mandigaon are not much attracted to this profession. Among my respondents, I have found none engaged in this profession in Dhaka. One male X-Ray operator was found who worked in a diagnostic center.

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<sup>46</sup> In Bangladesh, a few Garos are working in superior positions in different Government offices. I know two persons, who have joined Bangladesh Civil Service, one is in Information cadre and the other is in Police cadre.

Table: 29  
Occupation of Dhaka dwelling Garos of the Village by Gender of Spouse

Nature of job	Male	Female	
Official/ Staff	7	1	
Advocate	1		
Beautician		21	
Bank staff	1		
Salesman	1		
BDR	1		
Driver	3		
Cook/Servant	2		
Guard	6		
Restaurant boy	1		
Housemaid		2	
Housewife/husband	1	1	
Total	24*	25	*One husband died. recently

Source: Field Study

A significant number of Garo women are found working in the Beauty Parlors. Beauty parlor is a fast growing business in Bangladesh, particularly in Dhaka and Chittagong. Other big cities also have beauty parlors. Even in every districts of Bangladesh, there are many "Hairdressing Saloon" in the name of beauty parlor. Now-a-days urban women have become more beauty conscious and women of different status and age, such as young girls, students, house wives, officers, executives and business-women often visit beauty parlors.

Before independence, in Dhaka, there were only two or three beauty parlors owned by the Chinese. Even, some 10 to 15 years back, number of parlors in Dhaka was a handful. Now, we find beauty parlors almost in every corner of Dhaka city: in shopping centers, in residential areas, in lanes and by lanes. Obviously, there are differences among those parlors in terms of quality of service rendered. Some beauty parlors are considered as modern and

sophisticated. Some of them have their branches in different locations in Dhaka. Beauty parlors offer women different types of services: hairdressing, bridal makeup along with other forms of bodily care such as, facial, pedicure, manicure etc. In the past, middle class people used to visit beauty parlors occasionally mainly for the purpose of bridal makeup; numbers of visit for haircutting were negligible then. However, situation has now changed largely. During the time of Eid or other festivals, beauty parlors remain busy all the time. In the last part of October 2005, a few days before Eid Ul- Fitr I visited some well known beauty parlors in Dhaka. All I found crowded with beauty conscious women.

In 1984, Burling observed (1997:234) an insignificant numbers of Garo women employed in beauty parlors compared to garments sector and professions like nursing. In course of time, the situation has reversed. Garo women are most likely to be found working in almost all beauty parlors of Dhaka city now. Even one of the Garo women of Mandigaon now owns a beauty parlor.

It is said that Garos started this profession when a Garo girl of Mandigaon found her way to an employment in a beauty parlor of Dhaka. Since then others have become attracted to this profession. Thus, numbers of women in the profession have increased over the time. Garo women have expressed their positive feelings about this profession since it offers them reasonably good salaries. Besides, working condition in parlors is relatively better than garment or other professional sector. Since they represent considerable number of workforce in the parlors, they find the working atmosphere pleasant.



Table: 30  
Income of the Garos of the Village Employed in Dhaka

Income level	Male	Female	Remarks
Upto 3000	6	3	
3001-6000	11	11	
6001-9000	2	4	
9001-12000	2	2	
12001-15000	1	3	
15000+	1	1*	* Owner of a Beauty parlor
Not in work	1	1	
Total	24**	25	** One husband died

Source: Field Study

Women working in beauty parlors generally are better paid compared to their male counterparts. In most cases, both husband and wife are found working. Husbands employed in petty or subordinate type of jobs usually receive small sum of money as salaries. For example, a night guard, cook or domestic help can hardly earn Tk. 3000/ as monthly payments, whereas, a junior worker in beauty parlor generally gets more than that. Senior beauticians are earning more than Tk. 12000/ per month. With the income of both wife and husband, poor Garos can humbly maintain a house or a shared apartment, bear family expenditures, educational expenses of the children etc. Moreover, regularly or occasionally, they can send money to their parents living in the village. This also helps a woman to maintain and enhance her status both in her family and in the village.

## Chapter: VI

### Residence, Gender and Power

*This is the main chapter of the thesis. The research findings related to residence pattern and its implication on gender role and power among Garos of the study village are presented, discussed and analyzed here on the basis of empirical evidences. It contains the information gathered by intensive fieldwork and case study methods.*

#### **6.1 Matrilineality and Post-Marital Residence of the Garos**

Examples of matrilineal societies are less common than patrilineal societies in the world. Nevertheless, matrilineality is found in some societies of African countries (for example the Asanti and the Tangas), in some parts of Southeast Asia and among the three ethnic groups of India and Bangladesh. In the world, Minangkabaus of West Sumatra in Indonesia comprises the largest ethnic group that follows the matrilineal system (Tanius, 1983: 358-90).

In this subcontinent, matrilineal systems are observed among some societies of south and northeast parts of India and Bangladesh. The Nayars and Mappilles in Kerala, and the small ethnic groups of Minicoy Island are matrilineal. The Khasis and the Garos of Bangladesh and India have matrilineal social system. It is said that the Brahui living in Baluchistan of Pakistan has matrilineal traces (Liddle & Joshi, 1986:53). Nevertheless, the kinship rule and social organization of these communities are not uniform everywhere. The system considerably differs from one system to another.

It is generally held that matrilineality has some broad principles, which include claim of descent from the lineage of the mothers, matrilocal

residence pattern, girls (especially youngest daughter) inheritance of property etc. (Passah 2003:181). Matrilocality is not necessarily associated with matrilineality, and in order to avoid the confusion of the two concepts anthropologists prefer to use the term 'uxorilocal', which simply refers to residence in the wife's place (Seymour-Smith, 1986:185). In case of the Garos, the term generally preferred is 'matrilocal' as their traditional residence rules are integrally interrelated to matrilineal kinship rule and inheritance pattern. Yet, both the term 'matrilocal' and 'uxorilocal' are often being used to explain different aspects and variation of their residence pattern.

In matrilineal system, difference is mostly observed in the pattern of residence. For example, the Nayers of Central Kerala of India was considered as an extremely matrilineal people because matrilineal form of social organization was reflected primarily in their laws of inheritance and marriage systems (Menon, 1996: 133). The Nayers lived in matrilineal joint families called *taravad*. A traditional *taravad* usually consisted of a set of matrilineally related kin, both male and female. This would include sisters and brothers, the sisters' children and their daughters' children. Descent was traced through female line, and property passed from a mother to her children, both male and female. But a son had no right to pass his inheritance on to his children. On his death it reverted back to his *taravad* (Menon, 1996:133). In the Nayar case, post-marital residence pattern was 'dulocal' in nature. In this pattern husband and wife lived separately in their natal house. Nayar men lived in their own *taravad*, with their mothers and sisters and visited their wives in the evening. They had no right and responsibilities over their children. According to the system, the

responsibilities of a woman's children were shouldered by her *taravad*. There are no fathers or in-laws in a *taravad*, and little importance is attached to a relationship between husband and wife or father and children (Ibid: 134).

Garos are often mistakenly thought as a matriarchal people. Matriarchy<sup>47</sup> means a form of social organization where women control power and authority. But ethnographic record does not provide evidences of truly matriarchal societies where women control all strategic and economic resources along with political authority (Podolefsky & Brown, 2001:165, Liddle and Joshi, 1986:52.). On the other hand, there are definitely many cases of matrilineal society where kinship and descent are traced exclusively through female line with matrilineal post marriage residence rules. While these societies afford women great deal of influence and covert political power they are not matriarchal. However, it does not mean that matriarchal societies never existed in the past; rather they may have become extinct (Podolefsky & Brown, 2001:165). Garo matrilineality does not imply that in Garo society women enjoy supremacy over men,

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<sup>47</sup> "The definition of matriarchy is as much in dispute as is the definition of patriarchy. When we refer to the matriarchal heritage, we do not mean the obverse of patriarchy, that is, a system of family organization where mothers have authority over men and the younger women. There is no evidence for a matriarchy having existed anywhere in the world, in the sense of women's rule over men being embodied in the family or social structure. What we do mean by the matriarchal heritage is a history of struggle where the idea of female power was constantly reasserted through the religion and where family forms, giving women greater freedom existed despite the opposition of the dominant patriarchal groups. The evidence for the struggle is found in the conflicts and accommodations between different modes of religious thought, and between the matrilineal and patrilineal family systems" (Liddle and Joshi, 1986:52).

rather in the sphere of economic and political control, the role and authority of men are more prominent. Even in the early days, Playfair observed that 'matriarchy' in the strict sense of the word did not exist among the Garos. A woman is merely the vehicle by which property descends from one generation to another (1909:72).

Garo matrilineality perhaps is more close to the Khasis, the other matrilineal community living in Bangladesh and in some parts of Khasi and Jaintia Hills in Meghalaya of India. While writing introductory note to Playfair's book *The Garos* (1909), Fuller referred to the similarity of Garo and Khasi matrilineal systems and suggested that Garos might have copied the system from their near neighbor Khasis<sup>48</sup>.

Khasi custom prescribes the transmission of ancestral property through females. Sons have no right to property except in exceptional cases when parents have no daughter. Generally it implies that the youngest daughter inherits the property. Secondary law suggests that if the woman does not have any daughter, then the property will go to her sister's son, and once the property right goes to the male hand it starts following the patrilineal form of property transmission. Tertiary law recommends something complementary to the secondary law. If a man owns any property, he can distribute it to any

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<sup>48</sup> "A curious feature of Garo economy is the surviving influence of the matriarchate. A man marries into his wife's family, and in theory it is the woman who holds the property. It is possible that the Garos have in this respect copied from their near neighbours the Khasis, with whom though of entirely different origin, some Garo tribes have intermarried freely. Amongst the Khasis the matriarchate is a living and active institution, influencing profoundly social and political life. A man's heir is not his son but his sister's son. So amongst the Garos it is to his sister's son that a man looks for the guardianship of his widow and children" ( Bampfylde Fuller in Playfair, 1909.xxxi-xxxii).

son or daughter he likes. In practice, the father never transfers the land to the daughter (Hasan, 1984:245).

Khasi residence pattern is matrilocal, but there are differences in respect of its form among them. Like Garos, Khasis are divided into different exogamous groups and sub-groups. But pattern of residence among them is not uniform; rather it represents a complex situation. For example among the *kinriam Khasi* the son-in-law is to reside with his mother-in-law in the same house. In case accommodation is not available within the same house he can live in a separate one adjacent to mother-in-laws. In any case, his earnings will go to his mother-in-laws household. Among the *sinteng* there is no such restriction. The couple may reside anywhere they like (Gordon, 1905: 62-63, 76-77, Khan, 1984: 258-259).

Compared to Khasis, residence pattern of the Garos seem simple and uniform. As a tradition, descent, inheritance and post-marital residence follow female line. Garos have different groups and sub-groups, sparsely distributed to many places in India and Bangladesh. There are cultural, environmental and linguistic differences among them, though basic social structure and customary laws are same everywhere. They follow an identical kinship system of matrilineal principles. Exogamous descent groups practically have no difference other than lineage name and localized variations of cultural practice. Among all descent groups, ideal residence pattern is matrilocal. It is customary that after marriage a man will move to his wife's house or village permanently. In every case, responsibility of a husband of an heiress daughter is to look after his parents-in-law and non-heiress husbands are relieved of such responsibilities. However, present

variation of post-marital residence pattern is not as simple as it is defined by their matrilineality. Rather, structurally the whole process is complicated.

## **6.2 Residence and Primary Identity of the Garos**

Karen Sack argues that woman's primary identity changes from sister to wife with the transition from kin-corporate society to a class society, while Cunningham suggests that women within the kin-corporate society could be sisters or wives, depending on their post-marital residence. In households with native wives, the women appear to have the rights of "sisters", while in households with wives from outside women's positions seem to be as "wives" (Cunningham, 1996:335).

My observation is that in any society either patrilineal or matrilineal, women's primary identity in the household can be changed depending on three important factors: post-marital residence, village of origin and family pattern. In her natal house a woman before marriage has two identities, both of a "daughter" and "sister". When after marriage she moves with her husband to a different village her identity reduced only to a "wife". On the other hand in matrilocal joint family women may have three identities: as daughters, as sisters and as wives. In his natal house, a son before marriage may have two identities: "son" and "brother". However, after marriage, if he moves to his wife's house he has one identity as "husband", but in a patrilocal joint family structure he may have three identities: son, brother and husband.

However, this is a general explanation. In a kin-based society as the Garos, identity of spouse seems to have other dimensions. A society where group

membership attaches much importance among members of the group, household identity and group identity differs largely. In accordance with their kinship rules, each of the Garos, irrespective of their residence shows loyalty to a specific lineage groups to whom they are socially connected. Burling refers to these groups as 'cooperating groups' (1997:209). In the Garo society, all members belonging to a specific group are considered as brothers or sisters, and they have obligation to cooperate with each other at the time of exigencies. When a Garo man moves to his wife's house, surely he loses his primary household identity of a son or a brother, yet in the group, he never loses his identity as a group member. In a different village he could easily find his group members from among those who share the same surname of his mother and even, without any social exchange psychologically, he becomes attached to them. They are their relatives in the village, who at the time of need may come forward to help them. This relationship or group association is perpetual and continues generation after generation. Therefore, as regards group sense he never loses his primary identity. Due to this, even in an unfamiliar situation Garos need not make fictive kinship with others. This is applicable in case of women also. In a matrilineal setting, a Garo woman never loses her primary identities as stated before. When she moves out, she also finds her *ma'chong* or clan members in her husband's village. Even in the absence of her mother's *ma'chong* in the village she can easily be associated with any of the main exogamous groups from which her mother's sub-group has originated. Here neither the husband nor the wife loses their group identity. It means that Garo women or men, when moves out from their natal village, may face a new situation but they do not become completely alien or stranger.



### **6.3 Kinship Considerations of Residence Choice**

Choice develops out of real situation in which host of factors are involved. Social, economic and psychological preferences of individual and group members may work as reasons for varied types of residence options. In a society where descent is traced through female and property passed exclusively through them, kinship prerogatives are significantly related to residence choice. However, an individual may have different perspectives in a changed situation and he may be in a position to determine his affairs with more freedom than they enjoy in a group structure. Thus, an ideal arrangement could also produce other circumstances depending on individual and group considerations. Variation of residence choice among Garos should be understood in this perspective.

In Mandigaon, it is observed that kinship principles still play a dominant role in the family structure and social behavior of the Garos. Although, it appears that kinship rules prescribe a rigid and uniform social pattern, flexibility is allowed to some extent within the framework of their kinship system. Relation between parents and siblings are important and it forms basic unit of the family. Among Garos this is significant both in household and group structure. When a male of a family moves out of the village, he becomes physically detached from his own family, but his psychological attachment to his own family never ends. He always makes a distinction between present residence and family of origin. From the point of view of this psychological dilemma individual's option may shift from ideal choice to other arrangements.

Wife's movement to husband's village to some extent depends on kinship requirements or economic prerogatives. Kinship requirement is that a man brings her wife with him because a woman of his own lineage needs to have a male relative's support and a young man is more likely to take better care of his own parent's family than that of his wife. The need for some lineage men to stay in their own villages means that a consistent residence rule is not possible (Burling, 1997:48).

Now-a-days it is observed that usually parents give away a portion of land to non-heiress daughter at the time of their marriage; even parents are giving part of the landed property to their sons. Usually land is given to sons with the motive that they will reside with the parents so that they may help parental household in times of exigencies. It has become possible due to the fact that women cannot exercise effective control over the disposal or transfer of landed property in a complex socio-economic pattern (Majumder 1985:292).

After moving at a distance, a male member of a family cannot take care of his parents, young brothers and sisters. This is a common idea that without a male member female cannot effectively take care of family affairs. In a situation where family needs a male support, parents seem less interested to allow their sons move out rather they prefer to bring in wives for their sons. This is applicable to all the Garos irrespective of social and economic status. Poor Garos also have some other reasons to bring in wives. For example, when wife's parents have no property, seldom a husband opts to move out.

Rather he wants to bring his wife in his family so that she can be of some help to his parents. In such a situation, a daughter of poor parents may not be interested to bring husband in her family; rather she may prefer to go to her husband's place.

Evidence shows that female-headed households without male members or lone son households are more likely to be influenced by kinship consideration of male support. In Mandigaon 8 households are found female headed. Among them 3 are single son households, where all sons have brought their wives, and 2 are found single daughter households, where all daughters remained matrilocal.

#### **6.4 Residence in Mandigaon**

Different aspects of post-marital residence pattern of the Garos are discussed in Chapter II (2.10) in the light of traditional society and society as one sees it at present. We have seen in previous discussion that diversity in residence pattern also existed among them in the past. In a traditional village *Rengsanggri*, Burling observed existence of great deal of variations in the residence pattern, although according to him, "reversed" marriages were distinctly a minority (1963:210). However, he was in the opinion that the diversity of Garo residence pattern was not an indication of change; neither was it the indication of "loose structuring" of the society. Rather according to him, all residence patterns were necessary to Garo kinship structure (see Chapter-II).

However, he observed different situation in Madhupur. Madhupur area of Bangladesh was not as traditional in the sense that Rengsangri of Garo Hills district of India was in 1950s. In Madhupur, he observed “very gradual changes” in the pattern of marital residence, and stressed upon its long time significance for Mandi kinship (Burling, 1997:131). He observed two kinds of marriage residence in Madhupur; these were “going as a son-in-law” and “going as a daughter-in-law”. Other than these two types he also observed temporary residence (either matrilocal or patrilocal) and neolocal households. Matrilocality was more common than patrilocal pattern, but temporary patrilocality was also common with increased trends.

There are similarities between Madhupur and Mandigaon in many respects as both the areas are now prone to modern culture. During fieldwork in Mandigaon, like Madhupur, I have also observed wide variations in the residence pattern. Following types of residence choice are observed:

1. Matrilocal
2. Patrilocal
3. Matrilocal Returned
4. Patrilocal Returned
5. Neolocal

In Mandigaon, residence does not follow any fixed rule as it depends on many other considerations of the spouses. On the other hand, residence after marriage could be both permanent and temporary arrangements. Initial residence after marriage is not the same as permanent residence (Burling, 1997:131). A couple may live in the husband’s village for a while, then for a number of reasons they may move to the wife’s village, and *vice versa* (Cunningham, 1996: 336). In the light of this observation, for a general

counting, I have listed those couples in the category of 'Matrilocal-Returned' (M-R) whose initial choice of residence was matrilocal but later they moved to husband's village; and I counted others as 'Patrilocal-Returned' (P-R) who had opted initially for patrilocality but later returned to wife's village. In the category of neolocal household I have counted the following couples:

- (1) those who have left the village after marriage and reportedly established their households in a separate village or a place other than in bride or groom's original village; and
- (2) those who came from other villages and now live in own households in Mandigaon.

In *Rengsangri*, Burling suggested that residence should be considered both from the point of view of the household and from the point of view of the village (see chapter-II, 2:10). It frequently happens that a boy moves to his wife's village after his marriage and sets up a new household with her there. Such marriages, according to him, is uxori-local with respect to the village but neolocal with respect to the household (Burling, 1963:213)

There are a few neolocal couples in Mandigaon who at the same time could be considered both as matrilocal and patrilocal. Initially after marriage they have started their conjugal life in parents household in the village and after a few years of interval established there own household near or away from parents' house. For the convenience of the study, these neolocal couples are counted in accordance with their initial choice of residence in the category of either matrilocal or patrilocal.

Few instances of patrilocal marriages were observed in *Rengsanggri* (Burling, 1963: 214). In Madhupur areas, married couples were seen to live matrilocally more often than patrilocally, although patrilocality was observed more common compared to *Rengsanggri*; but such changes, in Burling's view, were gradual, and not dramatic (1997:133).

In Mandigaon I have observed that traditional practice of matrilocal residence is also more common than patrilocality. However, although, matrilocality has been considered as ideal type, residence seems flexible in the village. Preference and adherence to any residence pattern involves many complications and consequences. There always exists a gap between ideal type and actual arrangements. Thus, it is difficult to make a straightforward classification of society's arrangements of residence choice. It appears to me that most of household members are in a fix in making decisions regarding what type of choice should be preferred. In most cases, they expressed contradictory views. About their son's marriage majority of them are opted in favor of bringing daughter-in-law, whereas in case of daughter's marriage they have shown their inclination in bringing son-in-law. It means that preferences do not always follow the same rule.

In my census, among 74 household couples (who are senior members of the household), 49 (66.21%) are found matrilocal, 17 (22.97%) are found patrilocal, 6 (8.10%) falls under the category of patrilocal returned, 2 couples are neolocal (Table-31 & Figure-1). There are 2 couples where Garos married to Muslims. They are included among patrilocals.

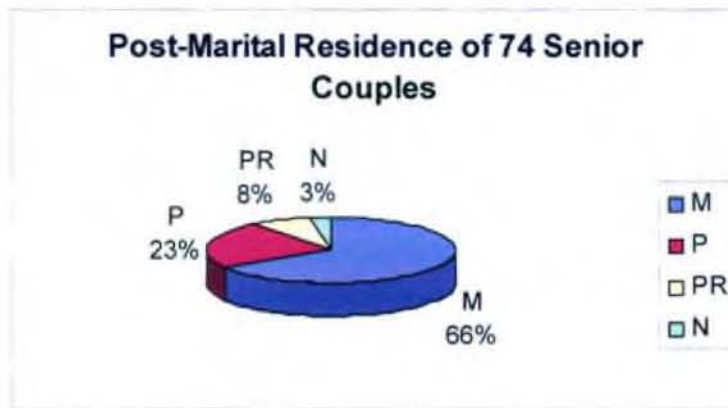
Table: 31

## Post-Marital Residence of 74 Senior Couples of the Village

Type	Number
Matrilocal	49(66.21%)
Patrilocal	17(22.97%)
P-R	6(8.10 %)
Neolocal	2(2.70%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>

Source: Field Census

Figure: 1



Among 74 households in the village, 155 couples of different residence choice are found (Table-32& Figure-2). They are composed of both older and younger couples in the family. Of them 100 couples are now affiliated with the village from either the wife's or the husband's side. Among 155 couples following five types of residence choice are found.

Table: 32

## Post-Marital Residence of 155 Couples of the Village

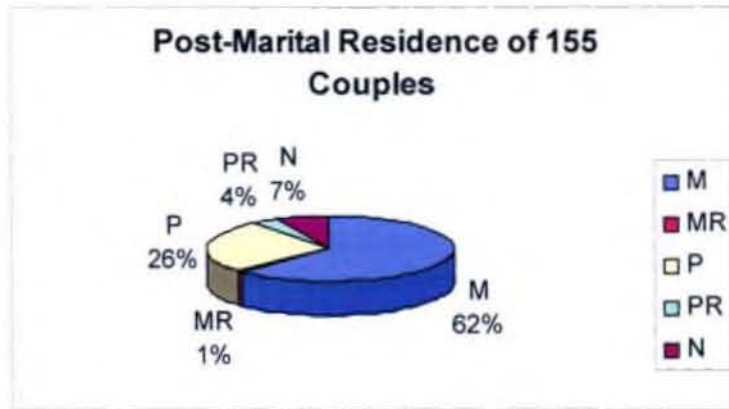
Type	Number
Matrilocal	97(62.58%)
M-R	1(0.65%)
Patrilocal	40(25.81%)
P-R	6(3.87%)
Neolocal	11(7.09%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>155</b>

*Source: Field Census*

Although, in Mandigaon prevalence of matrilocality is still more compared to patrilocality, it is observed from the statistics presented in Table-31 & Table-32 that percentage of patrilocality is in increase (23% and 26% respectively), with a more increasing (3% and 7% respectively) trend in respect of neolocal pattern. Table-32 shows that out of 155 couples 97 are matrilocality, 40 are patrilocality and 11 falls under the neolocal category. Only one couple is found whose initial choice was matrilocality, but after few years of interval they have returned to Mandigaon and now are residing in the village. This type of couple could also be termed as matri-patrilocality as both practices are observed among them. Six couples were found in the category of patrilocality returned, and they may be called as parti-matrilocality in the same sense.



Figure: 2



There are variations in the pattern of matrilocal residence also. To some extent, matrilocal residence among Garos is avunculocal in nature. As a custom ideal choice of husband for a heiress daughter is her father's sister's son. When a boy marries his mother's brother's daughter, and moves to reside with the wife, the husband at the same time goes to his maternal uncle's (who is his father-in-law) house. In this situation, residence is both matrilocal and avunculocal. This typical avunculocal arrangement is approved by the society, and it provides a basis for continued family bond between two *maharis* of husband and wife. In the present circumstances, examples of such marriage are a few. In the village I have found 12 *nokna* marriages, which are matrilocal and at the same time avunculocal in nature (see Table-21, chapter-V, 5:2). Non-heiress daughter's marriage may also be avunculocal if husband is chosen from among close relations of the father.

Patrilocality and neolocality are increasing now in a rapid way. The trend is mostly observed among young couples under 40 years of age. One or two generations back, there were instances of patrilocality but the trend was not so frequent. Table-33 shows a comparative statement of residence choice between current and parental generation.

Table: 33

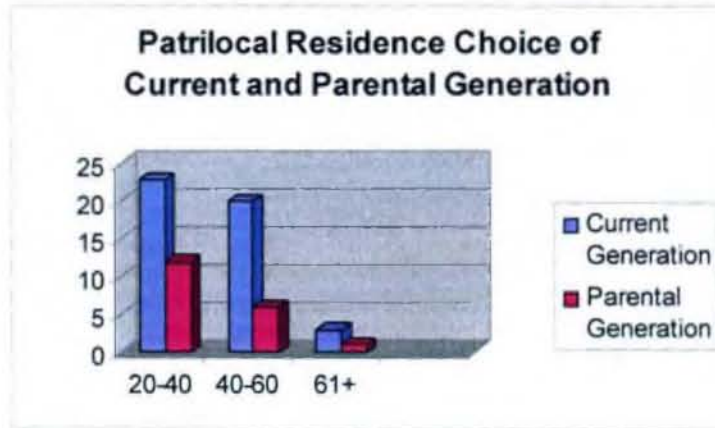
## Residence Choice of Current and Parental Generation by Age

Age of Couple	Matrilocal		Patrilocal		Neolocal	
	Current Gen.	Parental Gen.	Current Gen.	Parental Gen.	Current Gen.	Parental Gen.
20-40	46(58.23%)	67(84.81%)	23(29.11%)	12(15.19%)	10(12.66%)	x
41-60	41(67.21%)	57(90.48%)	20(32.79%)	6(9.52%)		x
60+	11(73.33%)	12(92.31%)	3(20%)	1(7.69%)	1(6.67%)	x
Total	98	136	46	19	11	x

Source: Field Census

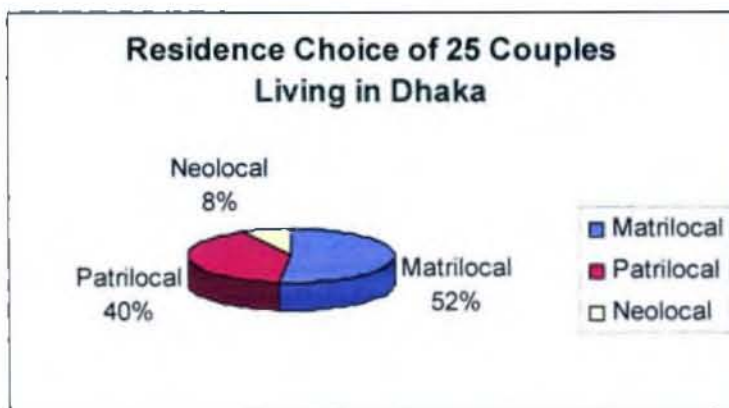
Table-33 shows that in the current generation less than seventy-four percent of couples in each age group fall into the category of matrilocal and in the parental generation it is more than ninety-two percent. On the other hand, in each age group thirty three percent current generation marriages fall into patrilocal category, whereas it is less than sixteen percent in parental generation. 11 couples in the current generation are found neolocal but in the parental generation, no neolocal couples are found. Figure-3 clearly indicates a diminishing trend to matrilocality and an increasing frequency of patrilocal and neolocal residence choice.

Figure: 3



Above mentioned 155 couples are composed of both rural and urban living couples, among them we have found 26% patrilocal. To examine the trend of patrilocal among urban couples, I have interviewed 25 couples of Mandigaon living in Dhaka. Of them 52% (13) are found matrilocal and 40% (10) are found patrilocal and 8 % ( 2) are neolocal. It appears that among urban Garos, numbers of patrilocal couples are more compared to them who are living in rural areas (Figure-4).

Figure: 4



## 6.5 Residence and Inheritance of Property

Law of inheritance or property right is one of the most important criteria of Garo matrilineality (see chapter-II, 2:9). In the present situation attitude towards custom of inheritance by a single daughter or other daughters has been changed largely due to the change in livelihood pattern. It is observed that instances of land transfer by mothers to their sons are in increase. Now, it is noticed that many Garos, even some old people are speaking against the stereotyped law of property right. This tendency can be explained as an attempt to give recognition of sons as the inheritor of mother's property. Generally land is given to sons with the intention that they would stay with the parents and help parental household in times of crisis. Another consideration is that female members cannot exercise effective control over the disposal or transfer of landed property in a complex socio-economic pattern. There are other reasons also, but, according to Majumder, this tendency is due more to the impact of patrilineal societies than to any real inconvenience felt in the matrilineal system (1985:292).

Burling observed that inheritance rules were straightforward and unambiguous in *Rengsangirri* (Burling, 1997: 147-150, see also Chapter II, 2.9). But in Madhupur he observed a different situation since practice of individual property transfer was not uniform everywhere and it did not always follow the traditional rules. In the absence of a general consensus on the issue, instances of land transferred to the children in varied degree were observed among them. He also observed a considerable change in outlook among the Garos regarding transfer, acquisition and distribution of property (Ibid: 148).

Mandigaon was a traditional Garo village, but at present, it is undergoing a rapid transformation. Like *Rengsangrri*, practice of transmission of property is not straightforward and unambiguous here; rather it has similarity with the inheritance and land tenural arrangements of Madhupur (Khaleque, 1992:241-242, see also chapter- II) and *Andharupara* (Islam, 1986:295-298, see also chapter-II). The main economic activity of the village is agricultural, and land is the most important economic resource of them. All property of the Garos is now family property and privately owned, including lands, houses, ponds, utensils, domestic animals etc. There is no *a'king* or communal land in the village except those of graveyards, playgrounds or village roads. People both male and female have direct ownership and declared access to the land belonging to them or their family. Group members have no say or control over other's economic resources. Only in case of disputes, they are to come forward for the purpose of settlement. Otherwise, control, management and disposal of property are vested upon concerned individual or household. Registering of land in the government office, keeping documents, paying land development taxes etc. are being done by the owners of land. They can sell their land with the permission of government. Indeed, land tenural arrangements are no longer different from those of Bangali neighbors. The only difference between them lies in inheritance pattern. At one stage, Garo customary rule regarding inheritance was so rigid that even all property acquired by a male member of the family by his own labor was considered as the property of his wife. Now the rule is flexible and male can acquire land at any time. In course of time, attitude towards transmission of land property through female line has been reversed largely. Now-a-days practice of land transfer among them is quite flexible

and parents are left with considerable freedom and discretion to decide how their land will be distributed.

Decision of parents in this regard depends on many considerations related to marriage and residence. In olden days, property ideally was transferred to a daughter preferably to the younger one who after marriage was supposed to reside with the parents. Non-heiress daughters were not at all deprived; they too were given some land for the establishment of separate households in the village close to the parents. Now-a-days land-transfer largely depends on residence choice of the children. In the present circumstances, instances of land transfer by parents to sons are a growing trend among them. Although once this was treated as deviation from matrilineal principle, the practice is well accepted now and it has been acknowledged by the society. Even today, when sons move out after marriage and reside with their wives, usually they are not given any property except a few household items or valuables as a token of love or gift. When a son leaves his own house after marriage but resides in the same village, parents of the son may transfer some land in favor of him. Parents' psychological and kinship considerations work here as the son is not physically detached from the family and at the time of need could be of some help to them.

We have discussed earlier (see Residence in Mandigaon, 6.4)) that among 74 senior household members, 49 are found matrilocal. It is observed that among them 45 wives have received land property from their parents, while in this category only five husbands gained land property from their parents. Among them two husbands are native to Mandigaon, two are from two adjacent villages, only one from a village of Nalitabari upazila. 15 household couples are patrilocal (excluding neolocal, patrilocal returned and outside

marriage). Among them 11 husbands received property from their parents, while no wife was given property by their parents. Four husbands received no property since their parents were landless (Table-34).

Table: 34

Types of Residence and Status of Land Inheritance among Garos in the .  
Village

Type	Nos. of Households/ Couples	Status of Land received from Parents		Remarks
		Nos. of Wives	Nos. of Husbands	
Matrilocal	49	45	5	Four wives gained no property since their parents were landless.
Patrilocal	15	x	11	Four husbands gained no property since their parents were landless.
Patrilocal returned	6	5	4	One wife and two husbands gained no property as their parents were landless.
Total	70			Other four couples who fall in the categories of neolocal and outside marriage not included here.

Source: Field Census.

This is striking evidence that land transfer has a direct correlation with children's residence choice. The practice of giving land to patrilocal sons, and depriving of matrilocal daughters is opposite to traditional practice. This is no doubt, a significant deviation from the principle of matrilineal inheritance. It appeared to me that although matrilineal bias still continues to dominate in the society, traditional practice of land transfer gradually is declining. It also appears that matrilineal principle of inheritance only works to that extent, where choice makes no difference concerning family support

by children. Here kinship considerations of the spouses or parents seem to play a major role in the process of transmission of property from mother to her children.

There are other evidences of such considerations in Mandigaon. Six couples are found who initially had preferred patrilocal choice and wives went to their husband's village after marriage. Among them four husbands obtained property from their parents. After few years, all six couples have returned to their wives' natal village. Of them five daughters received some land from their family. Among them four couples returned to wives' village with an intention to assure their right over wives' mothers' family property. In spite of the fact that their spouses have gained family property, two wives returned to Mandigaon for the reasons of adjustment problem with the sisters of their husbands. Couples whose residence is not permanent may be benefited in two ways: they may get both their husband's and wife's family property.

Above-mentioned couples mostly are older generations couples, most of them are over 40 years of age. Young generation couples normally live in joint family with their parents. In the village, among Garos, number of joint families is more compared to their Bangali neighbors. Jointness is inherent in their family structure and Garos perpetuate this through descent and inheritance. In a joint family structure rate of subtractions of agricultural land are always slow. Only after death of the parents, children may divide their family property among themselves. Therefore, it is always difficult to determine how many of young generation couples have received family property after their marriage. Apart from "yes" or "no" answers, a third reply "not yet received" makes the whole process of understanding



complicated. Therefore, I have given up the idea of such exercise, rather tried to understand their mind in the present circumstances.

In a matrilineal pattern of residence, women usually get parental property. Their access to resources is direct, whereas males have indirect authority over resources since they are the guardians and managers of wives' property. These arrangements of property managements may not be permanent as it depends on the continuity of conjugal life of couples. After the death of a wife, her family may refuse to take care of the widower. This situation sometimes could lead to an ultimate helplessness of a male person. Some male Garos expressed their resentments over the issue of such property arrangements. When a wife dies without any child, and no replacement is arranged for the husband by the lineage of the deceased wife, widower becomes almost like a guest in the family. His condition may worsen, when in-laws show reluctance to keep him in the house. In such a case, one may decide to return to his original village. Here, after return to his natal home, again he may face the same acrimonious situation since as a son or as a brother he has no claim over any thing of his mother's or sister's family. I have been told about one instance of such occurrences in a different village where after the sudden death of a young wife replacement was not provided. Rather family of the deceased had shown unwillingness to keep him in the household and asked him to leave. Eventually the poor husband had to leave the village. However, this is a rare case and should not be generalized.

It seems to me that traditional inheritance pattern is at a stake. A radical attitude has been developed over the time among young Garos in favor of change in inheritance rules. Some writers are of the opinion that this strong urge for change in their traditional inheritance pattern is the manifestation of

the process of change from matrilineal to patrilineal pattern (Islam, 1986: 298, Burling 1997:133). During my study among Garo couples of Mandigaon living in Dhaka city, I asked 25 respondents whether they wanted a change in their residence pattern. Strikingly, irrespective of male or female, all spouses expressed their view in favor of change. To them, this is unfair to keep male persons deprived of family property. They want that every child must get a share of their family property. There are different expressions about what rule should be followed or who should get more, but majority being in favor of equal share. One young man said to me:

In our system, we are deprived of property rights. We are very dependent on women. Without property, a male cannot keep his personality. This system should be changed.

## **6.6 Residence and Gender Roles**

Among the Mande of Sierra Leone, Cunningham observed, gender relations in the households with wives native to the village were quite different from those in the village with wives from outside (1996:335). Keeping in mind some other factors involved in shaping gender relation in the households, her proposition could well be generalized in investigating the relationship between post-marital residence and gender relations of many other societies, either matrilocal or patrilocal.

In a patrilineal pattern, men clearly have an upper hand in household decision-making. They have political, social and economic control over resources. To some extent, they alone can make decisions without discussing women members of their family. Invisibility of women in the decision-making is a worldwide fact. This is typical in most of the developing

countries of Asia and Africa where gender discrimination is situated within deeply ingrained systems of patriarchy, which limits and confines women to subordinate roles. South Asia is one of the glaring examples of gender discrimination. According to Mahbubul Haque, women bear the greatest burden of human deprivation in South Asia (Human development in South Asia 2000:1). However, it is said that compared to other South Asian women, Garos have achieved a better balance in their gender roles. Both men and women have important jobs to do, and they are dependent upon one another (Burling, 1997:59). Matrilineal principles have given women a sense of security, but men and women both share responsibilities in their family and social affairs.

However, in a traditional Garo residence pattern, a woman is more secure. She enjoys greater degree of liberty and respect than her patrilineal counterpart. In her natal village, with the rights of ownership and lineage group support, she enjoys more authority in household decision making and access to resources in an environment familiar from early days. When she is in her husband's village or in a neolocal establishment, she seems to be in a subordinate position. This correlation of residence pattern with gender role and position of a woman is significant in understanding women's status in a society.

In a patriarchal or patrilineal society, women may not always be deprived of parental property. For example in a Muslim society, women have a recognized claim in parental property equal to one-half of the share of brothers, a recognized claim to conjugal property in the event of widowhood (Uberoi, 1994:237). As a matter of right, a Muslim woman has

always a claim over parental property. Her choice of residence makes here no difference. Apparently, Garo women seem to be placed in a better position, since as a rule, property of the Garos is always transmitted through women. Yet, in this respect Garo inheritance pattern provides no assurance for women compared to Muslim women. Since there is no set rule in their society, the inheritance of property entirely is left with parent's discretion. When a wife moves out of her parental house, she does so knowing fully well that she might be deprived of family property. In the forgoing pages we have seen in Mandigaon that residence has a strong impact over inheritance (Table-34). In the village, among 15 patrilocal wives, no one has received any parental property. On the other hand among 49 matrilocal wives, 45 received (other four wives parent are landless) property from their parents. Among 49 husbands, only four have received parental property. Evidences are very clear. It shows a strong implication of residence over access to property.

Village identity is an important factor in influencing gender role in a society. For the study of gender relations between native and non-native Garos of Mandigaon, following Cunnigham's idea (1996:338) I have divided 74 conjugal households of Mandigaon into four categories based on where the husbands and senior wives are from:

1. Households in which the wife is from Mandigaon and the husband is from outside.
2. Households in which the husband is from Mandigaon and the wife is from outside.
3. Households in which both husband and wife are from Mandigaon.
4. Households in which both husband and wife are from outside.

Table: 35  
Residence Category of 74 Household Couples in Respect of Village of Origin

Wife from the village: Husband from outside	Husband from the village: Wife from outside	Both husband and wife are from the village	Both husband and wife are from outside
42(56.76%)	16(21.62%)	14(18.92%)	2(2.70%)

*Source: Field Census*

All category-1 households presented in the Table-35 are matrilocal, and all category-2 households are patrilocal. Category-3 households are composed of both patrilocal and matrilocal couples. The fourth category includes 2 neolocal couples who had settled in the village coming from other areas. Among them, one woman has kin connection, as the village is her maternal grand mother's village. Another couple has indeed no kin-relation with the villagers. They now live in Sherpur and occasionally visit Mandigaon. It appears from the table that couples with wives from the village and husbands from outside have been more common.

We have discussed before that among 74 households 155 married couples of different residence choice have been found, out them 100 couples are now permanently associated with Mandigaon in respect of their post-marital residence. In order to explore this trend I have divided them into three age groups and looked at their residence category in respect of village (Table-36).

Table: 36

## Residence Category 100 Couples in Respect of Age and Village of Origin

Age of Couple	Wife from the village: Husband from outside	Husband from the village: Wife from outside	Both husband and wife are from the village:	Both husband and wife are from outside
20-40	26	7	8	1
41-60	24	12	8	1
60+	6	4	3	
Total	56(56%)	23(23%)	19(19%)	2(2%)

Source: Field Census

Table-36 shows that among 100 household couples 56% falls in the category, where wife is from Mandigaon and the husband is from outside, while 23% wives have been brought from outside. Both the Table-35 and 36 give almost similar picture in all four categories, although a slight increase is observed in category-2 marriages.

Where mother resides, Garos consider the village as their real home. When Garo women move to husband's house after marriage, they get a new home. There they become the mother of their own children. They raise their offspring in that house along with spending the rest of their life there. In such cases their children also consider the original home of their mothers as their real home. When I asked them about their original village, every body expressed the name of the village where their mothers had been residing. However, to avoid complicity they use mother's current resident-village name as their own village. When a daughter of a patrilocal mother marries and remains in her natal house, which is actually her father's original home, the notion of original home shifts from that of her mother's original village

to daughter's village and her children considers mother's natal house as their original home instead of maternal grandmother's. Here notion of original home may differ substantially from one generation to the next depending on generational variation of post-marital resident choice. This situation is more complex than to explain in a simple way. In Mandigaon, some couples are found who are matrilocal by residence choice; but their parent's choice of residence was patrilocal. Indeed, where married couples end up residing is, however, of utmost importance (Cunningham, 1996:336).

Women who are from the village seem to be in an advantageous position in terms of both land ownership and kin-support. Other than homestead, Mandigaon land is a plain agricultural land. Both men and women work in the fields. A husband from outside village usually manages and cultivates his wife's agricultural land, but he is not the owner of what he produces. Selling and buying of household materials and other arrangements related to household products need wife's consent.

In the Garo society women are supposed to reside with their mother or close to their mother's house. In such a residential arrangement after marriage, a woman never loses her primary identity as a sister or a daughter; rather in addition, the marriage attributes a new role of a wife upon her. In her natal house, a woman can exercise spontaneous authority over household affairs or economic resources. In the natal village at any time, she gets supports of her relatives. She is not at all dependent on her husband for all material and social purpose, and enjoys secured position in the presence of her kin.

Women's participation in social activities largely depends on her place of residence and environment. In Bangladesh, rural women are engaged in

different activities, yet efforts are not always organized. Sometimes they work in cooperatives, mainly organized by NGOs through their micro credit initiatives. In Mandigaon, several NGOs have been working for socio-economic uplift of the people. Some NGOs, particularly World Vision and Caritas, are mainly targeted to the Garos. In the village there is a local NGO named *Adibasi Unnayan Shangstha*, run by women members. The society has 30 women members. Most of them are from Mandigaon, some are from adjacent villages. They engage themselves in different activities and provide micro-credits in the field of agriculture, fisheries, cow and goat rearing, sanitation etc. They have taken four ponds from Mandigaon and one from Dudnoi for the purpose of fish cultivation with the financial and technical assistance of Research Initiatives Bangladesh (RIB). Here leadership and participation appear to be related with residence. The head of the society is a woman of Mandigaon. She lives in a matrilineal joint family. Her husband is a teacher. Her father once was the Chairman of village council. She enjoys all support from her family members while doing society's activities.

Women who are not from Mandigaon, their role and position in households seem different. We have discussed earlier that a wife from outside village has less opportunity of enjoying kin support unless she has relatives in the village. Although this is a deviation from traditional rule, it is seen in Mandigaon that a husband from the village usually gets a share of his parental property. However, in a joint family, property may not be divided before the death of parents. If, land is not transferred to a son formally, yet he has access to parental resources. On the other hand, in a joint family, if a patrilineal male has matrilineal sisters, his access over parental property is not always assured; because, as a rule sister's claim over property is absolute.



Here residence has different implications on gender roles, marked by women's identity in the family as a sister or a wife. Garo women are socialized in a process where a natal woman always enjoys reasonable authority over family matters and resources. In an outside village, role of a wife could be invisible or limited only to household works. This involves the obligations of a wife, a daughter-in-law and a mother. This includes bringing up the children, looking after husband and being responsible for all the domestic works such as cooking, cleaning, washing, caring of in-laws etc. The work women have to do in the nuclear family is the same as the work in the joint family with the exception of taking care of the in-laws (Liddle & Joshi, 1986:143-147).

Garo families are groomed in bringing the husbands from other *ma'chong* or group, not the wives. A woman in the husband's family may face hostile situations in exercising her authority as a wife. Household members may not accept her in the way they accept a husband from other *ma'chong*. Sometime quarrel occurs after wife is brought in husband's house. Particularly a wife faces problem of adjustment with the sisters of husband. One of my patrilocal male respondents told me that in a Garo household women from different *ma'chong* could not live together. At one stage, they must be separated from their parent's household. His wife told me that she had also faced same problem after she came as a wife in the family. She had no close kin in the village. Her husband had sisters and brothers. In the beginning, she had difficulties in adjusting with them. After one year, they were separated from husband's parent's family and established a neolocal household in the village. Her husband was not given his mother's property but obtained homestead and some agricultural land from his father.

Two sisters of Mandigaon initially went as daughters-in-law to an adjacent village. After 3 years, one of them returned to Mandigaon with her husband. She told me that she had faced serious problems in her husband's family. It was a traditional joint family and she tried to adopt with the existing structure. Particularly she faced problems of adjustments with the female members of the family. Her husband had mother, sisters and their daughters in the family. They did not treat her properly. She had to do all household works including cooking, cleaning, washing, caring of parents-in-laws and other in-laws. Her relations with mother-in-law, sisters-in-law and nieces were always strained and acrimony with them existed in all petty family affairs. Due to this reason, she decided to return to her own village. Her sister initially was accepted in her husband's family. Her parents-in-law even gave his son a small piece of land verbally, but later on, her parents-in-law sold the land without their consent. It happened because of the pressure of other female members of the family. This bitter experience prompted them to return to Mandigaon after three years of conjugal life in the joint family of the husband. After their return to Mandigaon, her parents gave her a small portion of homestead land. Both the sisters are poor and now subsist on day laboring. Their husbands are working as guards in Sirajganj district.

One educated couple conceded to me that in a patrilocal situation there was every possibility of wife's adjustment problem in husband's joint family. However, this situation is not same everywhere. Responsibilities of adjustment lie not only on husband's family members but to some extent to the wife also. His wife told me that they were the one of the older generation patrilocal couples in the village. However, she never had felt difficulties in

the family. Their two sons have also brought wives, and they are now well adjusted in the family.

Households where both husband and wife are from Mandigaon are composed of patrilocal and matrilocal as well as neolocal couples. Gender roles appear to be more balanced in this category than other categories. Since they are from the same villages, both can enjoy support and cooperation of relatives and group members.

Neolocal household's couples who are from outside, have less possibility of getting kin-support in the village. Their relations with others in the village mainly are based on intrapersonal connections. Women's works in such households involve a wife and a mother only. In other domestic works their roles are the same as the works of women in other categories. However, their accesses to economy and in other village affairs have a marked difference compared to native household members. They seem a little bit alienated from village affairs.

### **6.7 Gender Specialization in Household Work**

Division of labor in the traditional sense does not exist in the village. Only a few older people can remember past practice of *jhum* cultivation. Rather they told me stories about how they had made small-forested hills suitable for plain cultivation. The type of work no doubt had some masculine flavor. Until today, ploughing of land is considered as a masculine job, although participation of women in ploughing is not uncommon. There are a few ponds in the village owned by rich families. Most of the households have their own big or small vegetable gardens, where different types of vegetables are grown. Hens, ducks and pigeons are common domestic birds. Few

households have cows, goats, pigs. Most of the households have small flower garden inside their homestead areas. Common fruits are mango, jackfruit, banana, coconut and litche. For cooking some households use kerosene, others are dependent on fuel-woods, which they buy from bazaars or collect from nearby forest areas. There is no clear division of labor among them. Both men and women share households work, and their works are supplementary to each other. Garo kinship system gives a basis for better gender role for women in household works.

In order to examine implications of residence patterns on gender relations in household works, I made a census on senior household members to gather ideas about the person (husband or wife) who does the following works: 1) ploughing land, 2) sowing, 3) harvesting paddies, 4) poultry, 5) fisheries, 6) working in fruit gardens, 7) working in vegetable gardens, 8) planting trees, 9) tending trees, 10) collecting fuel-wood, 11) child rearing, 12) cooking, 13) buying and selling. Among 74 households, eight are female heads, 11 husbands work outside village and visit the village after interval. One household head is a widower. In cases of *de facto*<sup>49</sup> and *de jure*<sup>50</sup> female heads the entire burden of household falls on to the wives. Among the rest 54 households there were little variation in the answers to the questions 3 to

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<sup>49</sup> *De facto* female heads are women whose husbands are absent due to labour or overseas migration, but they have on going contact with their spouses and family members through occasional visit, sending letter or remittances. In this way absent man, may in some cases continue to exert major control over family life.

<sup>50</sup> *De jure* Women headed households denote households where women live without a male partner on a more or less permanent basis and receive no economic support.

11. There is no specific division of labor in doing those works. Both males and females usually do the work at their convenience.

Table: 37

## Gender specialization in Household Work

Types of work	Who does what		
	Male	Female	Both
Ploughing land	27	2	25
Sowing	4	2	48
Harvesting paddies		2	52
Fisheries	2	2	52
Poultry	2	3	49
Working in vegetable gardens		4	50
Working in fruit gardens			54
Planting trees			54
Tending trees			54
Collecting fuel wood	2	5	47
Child rearing		7	47
Cooking		37	17
Buying and selling	14		40

Source: Field Census

Table-37 shows that a significant difference exists between male and female in respects of cooking and ploughing. Among 54 households 37 answered that women usually do cooking, while 17 answered that both husband and wife do it. Garo women are not restricted to work in the fields like Bangali women. They work throughout the agricultural cycles along with their husbands. Women mainly do sowing, transplanting and harvesting of paddies. After harvest, they do the work of threshing and drying paddies in the sun. Although sowing and harvesting of paddies are done by both genders, in the village the males do ploughing mostly. Of them 27 households answered that males do the ploughing, 25 answered both male

and female members share the work, whereas only in two cases answers were women. Both male and female Garos go to markets and do buying and selling. Main selling items of the village are paddy, vegetables etc. Of them, 40 couples responded that both male and female sell crops and buy necessary articles from the market, and 14 answered that males do it. Only seven said that women take care of the child, while 47 said both wife and husband perform the responsibility of child caring. It appears that irrespective of residence pattern, gender relations related to household works are almost similar.

However, among professionals living in Dhaka, variations in gender specialization are observed. Among 25 respondent couples 24 (one being widower) said that usually women do cooking, 8 answered both do it. Both share childcare responsibility, whereas the male member mostly buys necessary articles from markets.

### **6. 8 Residences and Power**

In a matrilineal structure of the Garos, implication of residence on power and position cannot simply be overruled. Power comes with authority. Residence alone cannot ensure authority in a society whether kin-based or class-based. Residence when associated with reasonable degree of independence of women in household or in social arena, only then residence has its implications on power and authority. However it always makes a difference when we are living in our own homes, we have greater autonomy, because it is our place (Menon, 1996: 134).

Early ethnographic evidences show that matrilineal systems provide the basis of a greater degree of freedom for women compared to the patrilineal

system. This freedom differed in its form and extent in different matrilineal communities. The important factor is that matrilineal groups depend on retaining a similar degree of control over both male and female members, whereas control over women is much more severe than control over men in a patrilineal descent (Liddle and Joshi, 1986:52).

Several scholars have highlighted the inherent contradictions in matrilineal systems. Audrey Richards (1950) refers to these contradictions as 'the matrilineal puzzle' (Nongbri, 1994:181). Indeed, as regards power and authority Garo kinship system has also inherent contradictions, which are apparent in the role of male and female in the society. Despite the fact that descent and inheritance follow mother's line among Garos, in terms of authority and control over resources men enjoy upper position. Due to the existence of structural conflict in the system, women are dependent on men in discharging their responsibilities. These contradictions again offer a ground for achieving balanced gender role between sexes. Men exercise their authority but not without the consent of women. The family system of the Garos is one factor that gives the women a very different status from women in the patrilineal societies of the lowlands. A husband who moves to his wife's village gains his right to clear and cultivate the land by virtue of his marriage. Men are dependent upon their wives for the material basis of life, and this must have given Garo women a degree of security that is not typical of most of their South Asian sisters (Burling, 1997:48).

Garo matrilineal kinship system never implied supremacy of women over men, although when in a conjugal family of her natal village, a woman

enjoys a considerable degree of autonomy in decision-making. In the Garo family, the authority is always in the hands of the male, in some spheres in the senior male of the family and in some other spheres in the elderly male lineage mates of the senior female. For example, among them *chra* is an important institution, composed of elder male members of the *mahari*. In almost all family affairs Garos are dependent on the decision of *chra*. However, in the traditional pattern of Garo family the women do not suffer the disadvantages suffered by most of the women in South Asian societies. Even after marriage a woman continues to get protection from the male members of her lineage. Her intimate involvement in inheritance has given her better chance to raise her status in the changed circumstances. Moreover, emphasis of matriliney gives the women a better lead in their endeavor for equal status with men (Majumder, 1985:299).

On the other hand, living in a matrilineal pattern, Garo men can exercise authority because the very kinship system provides the basis for male support for the maintenance of family. Male members or male relatives of a family attach utmost importance in their family structure. Husband of an heiress daughter (ideally her mother's brother) exercises avunculocal authority in the family. When a *nokrom* joins his wife's family, he finds his mother's brother in the family. It is implied that, responsibility of a *nokram* is to take care of his parents-in-laws family. A person, who is responsible to take care of family members no doubt, has a considerable degree of autonomy in family decision. Even, if he is a new comer in the family, his position combined with his uncle's (father-in-law) position may establish a dual authority over familial decision. However, in the presence of wife's brother his authority is not absolute as wife's brother exercises greater



authority on his family members. This conflict between the husband and his wife's brother becomes delicate especially in societies in which marriage becomes an enduring institution ((Nongbri, 1994:182).

There are other contradictions also. In the Garo matrilineal pattern a man is denied full authority over his children as children belong to his wife's lineage. *Mahari* or *chra* exercises more influence on children than he does. In this respect, male authority over females of their own lineage and authority over wives are not same since Garo men exercise their greatest authority over female of their own lineage, not over their own wives, who belong to a different lineage (Khaleque, 1992:154).

Even, when a wife is an outsider in her husband's village, children too belong to her lineage, but her husband is not denied authority over his children as in this pattern of residence, wife's brothers are not likely in a position to wield full influence on their sister's children. However, in terms of economic resources such wife always lacks authority. When both husband and wife are from the same village, power relation between husband and wife takes a different shape as both are in a position to exert authority in household from the point of view of village and from the point of view of lineage support.

In the present context, implication of residence on power relation between husband and wife in the Garo society cannot be explained in traditional sense. Where other social and economic considerations work, control of *mahari* or *chra* may not be as dominant as defined in the kinship system. Now-a-days numbers of *nokna* marriages are decreased with the increase of patrilineal and neolocal residence choice. Growing trends of son's preference

in respect of property transmission vitiated fundamental aspects of matrilineal principle of inheritance. Besides, status of education and employment works in the way of achieving independence and authority of both sexes. An educated person, or a person better employed, may otherwise decide about his or her personal or household affairs. In these circumstances, implication of residence on power among Garos may be explained in the light of present situation than in the context of traditional family or group perspectives.

### **6.9 Position in Household Decision Making**

During my fieldwork in the village, I have asked following questions to the household heads (male or female) in order to understand the trend of both gender roles and household decision-making situation in the matters of 1) children's marriage, 2) children's education, 3) keeping money, 4) daily household expenditure, 5) purchase of land, 6) selling land, 7) borrowing money, 8) lending money, 9) investment in business, 10) selling paddies, 11) selling vegetables and 12) selling trees. Responses received from both the sexes appeared quite balanced in terms of position of men and women in household decision-making. Among 54 households, (others being female headed or husband works outside village) all said that they used to take decisions jointly. As I asked whose decision is finally preferred in household affairs, most of them, both male and female answered that it is the husband who takes final decision. In this respect, since all household answers are identical, apparently it appears that in respect of male authority residence has no implications. Few case studies are also conducted among young couples in this regard, and they have responded in the same way by giving importance of males in the process of decision-making. This situation, in my

view, may be explained in two ways. One is that, the socially constructed idea of male subordination is so deep rooted in their social structure over the time that perhaps women are accustomed to thinking the way they are socialized. Another reason might be that women across societies are considered weaker sex. Since Garo women also suffer from this inferiority complex, they do not want to challenge male authority.

From our own experience and observation of patrilineal societies, we know that authority may be vested upon women in some cases depending on work, education and family status of women. For example, when a wife's kins are socially and politically influential or a wife is better employed, her husband may not be in a position to exercise his authority without the support of wife. In this context, position and role of a person differs over time, and from household to household. This is also applicable in matrilineal pattern.

#### **6.10 Village Council and Settlement of Disputes**

In Mandigaon, the Village Council settles inter-clan disputes and other issues related to clan affairs. Under the traditional background of the Garos, *nokma* was regarded head of the village. He was the focal point of all social, economic and religious activities in the village. At present, institution of *nokma* no longer exists as an administrative entity. But, until today the term *nokma* has some ceremonial importance. Now-a-days during the time of festival, a person or a Parish Priest assumes responsibility of *nokma*. For example, *wangala* is the greatest festival of the Garos. With the advent of Christianity, the festival was abandoned. In the recent past, it has been revived in many areas. Garos living in Dhaka now arrange *wangala* festival every year. In 1998, Nokmandi of Dhaka introduced *nokmaship* for the

continuation of the festival. Mariamnagar Mission has been organizing *wangala* since 1985. In the festivity of *wangala*, the Parish Priest usually performs the role of *nokma*.

At present, Chairman of the village council is considered as head of the village. He is known as *matbar*. The council is governed under the guidance of Parish Council. As a rule, Father of the Mission is the *ex-officio* head of the Parish Council. In addition, there are nine elected members in the Parish. Under the Parish, every village has their own council elected for three years by the adult members of the village. Following is the composition of the village council:

1. President/ Matbar-1
2. Secretary-1
3. Treasurer-1
4. Members-2

Responsibility and obligation of the council include settlement of inter-clan disputes, arrangements of festivals and rituals, maintenance of peace and order among the community members. The council has no formal authority or power to execute decisions. If a person refuses to pay compensation, the aggrieved party has no way left other than going to Tribal Welfare Association (TWA) or Civil Court. Yet it is expected that every member of the community will abide by the decisions taken by the council since this is socially binding upon them. As a tradition, concerned *mahari* or *ma'chong* takes the responsibilities to execute decisions of the council. In the Garo family structure position of *chra* or the decision of *mahari* is important. When *chra* or *mahari* fails to settle any dispute, it goes to the council. When council fails to give decision, they refer it to Tribal Welfare Association

(TWA). Nevertheless, it is open to the parties to seek justice to any local government authority or in any court of law. However, Garos are more likely to settle disputes among themselves first.

When dispute arises, the Council calls important members of the community along with concerned *chra* and *mahari* members. In fact, what they do is a kind of village *shalish* (arbitration). After given sufficient hearing to both the parties, they give decisions in accordance with the Garo customary law and practices. However, penalty is imposed considering economic and social status of the accused. In accordance with the customary law, amount of fine (Garos of Mandigaon call it *Gamma*) imposed for an offence is negligible. For example, in the past, when a person committed an offence of rape, he was supposed to pay taka 60/- as fine. Now it is raised up to Taka 5000/. However, I am reported that no such offence has been committed in the village so far. Garos of the village are very calm and quite and seldom engage in quarrels with each other. As a result, numbers of cases referred to the council are a few. In 2004, there were only three cases referred to the council and in 2005 until recently, only one.

Among Garos most of the disputes arise on the issues of property, inheritance, domestic quarrels within the family, violation of customary laws and extramarital and premarital sexual irregularities. I am told about two cases of disputes. One is an alleged case of adultery. Mother of an unmarried girl complained that her daughter had an affair with a young boy. Eventually she became pregnant and gave birth to a child. When the boy refused to accept the child, they came with the complaint to the council. The accused had refused the allegation, and said that he had no sexual relation with her; neither the newly born child was his. After taking oral evidence of some

witnesses, the council was convinced that there was an affair between them, although, they failed to reach in a decision about who was actually the father of the said child. In this situation, a juri board was formed to further investigate into the matter. Ultimately, the matter was kept unresolved. Afterwards it was known that the claim of mother was not true and somebody else, other than the accused, was the father of the illegal child.

In 2004, another case was referred to village council concerning violation of marriage and a *'kim* rule. A Plaintiff woman from *chiran mahari* complained that after the death of her son, her daughter-in-law (a *chumbergong* woman) married a *Chisim* man without asking *chiran mahari* to provide her a replacement husband. As such she and her new husband dishonored her *chiran mahari* and acted in violation of the *a'kim* rule. Council called both the accused and members of respective *mahari*. In the proceeding of the council, the two accused parties conceded their mistake. A jury board constituted by the council imposed fine of a total 4000 taka, to be realized equally from both *chambergong* and *Chisim mahari*. As such the case was disposed.

Four members of the village council, including *matbar* are matrilocal males, and came from other villages. Another member of the council is a patrilocal male and original resident of Mandigaon village. All five members are elected from five different sub-groups. It appears that, in the election process of Village Council residence pattern of the members or group affiliation has little impact, rather it depends on member's personal quality.

Nonetheless, council represents a trend of male authority. Ganguly pointed out that in the Jhumia society, it is a taboo for the women to be members of

Village Council, and no women can be a chief or priest. The subservient status of women is confirmed by the fact that they are not given any scope for taking part in the society's decision-making process (Ganguly, 1993:71). In Mandigaon, there is no such taboo for women to be members of Village Council. Yet there is no woman member in the present Village Council of Mandigaon. A woman contested in the election of the council, but she failed to be elected. In the previous council there was a female member. Women's participation in the proceeding of dispute settlement is negligible. In most cases, they participate as silent observers; however situation may be different in other places. For example, a woman now is the president of the Jhenaigati Tribal Welfare Association. She exercises much authority over tribal affairs of the locality.

## Chapter-VII

### Factors of Change

*When society transforms, it discards many things of old heritage. Process of transformation could never be explained in a simple way. It involves many cross-cutting issues. The changes that have occurred in Garo lives and in their matrilineal principles, no doubt, are the outcome of several interrelated factors.*

*Most of the ethnographic studies discussed mainly five external factors as forces of social change among Garos; these are Christianity, introduction to formal education, change in the mode of agriculture and land ownership system and influence of neighboring people. No one can ignore significance of these factors, which indeed had initiated process of transition and shaped Garo society in its present form. In addition, wave of urbanization, work and income, different development initiatives of the Government and NGOs and exposure to media have also pushed them from their traditional setting to a new situation. All these factors are also vital in determining their present residence pattern. In the following pages some factors related to social and economic changes in the village are discussed and analyzed.*

#### **7.1 Influence of Christianity**

The ethnic situation of the Garos seems to be vitiated by a factor of considerable significance, that is, Christianity (Shashi, 1994:99). With a few exceptions almost all Garos are now Christians. Christianity has changed spiritual life of the Garos and placed them in a world of modernity. It has also sapped their traditional culture, thus loosening the convert's mental and social roots (ibid, 1994:99). The British annexation of Garo Hills and the subsequent works of Christian Missionaries coupled with the introduction of English education had direct influence upon the social customs, traditional beliefs, customary laws and practices of Garos. Dewan Singh Rangumathu



observed, "What little education they (Garos) have been getting being Christian predominated, make them lose sight of the true human heritage" (ibid, 1994:99).

Nevertheless, it is probably more due to the Christianity that they are able to maintain their separate identity in a society predominated by Muslims in Bangladesh. It is because of the fact that Christianity has provided them a sense of belonging to a world community and at the same time allowed them to remain distinctively Garo. "Other than that Christianity provides Garos with an important identity marker, it has a major impact on their socio-economic, psychological, cultural, and political situation; it influences their outlook on life and on the world, provides them with a sense of belonging to a world that extends far beyond the borders of Bangladesh, offers new educational and professional opportunities, and regulates relationship with their society and with others" (Bal, 2000:131).

Most of the anthropological literature (see Burling, 1963, 1997, Majumder 1980, 1985 Khaleque 1983, 1985) suggested that Christianity has had little effect on Garo kinship social organization, although Christianity came in their life with western patrilineal values and cultural concepts. However, the Missionaries, particularly drawn to their matrilineality and were amazed at the resilient kinship structure of Garo society. They found that in practice the "matriarchal system" worked fairly well (Syiemlieh, 2003:174). Initially they perceived few drawbacks in the system and tried to modify the custom by substituting the Christian law of marriage and inheritance. Significant changes came in the form of marriage system, and they no longer observed the old marriage ceremonies. But the changes due to Christianity in their

social life were not as drastic as it was contemplated, and Garos have continued to remain matrilineal (ibid: 175).

However, conversion to Christianity has weakened matrilineal system. Many of the traditional rites centered in the matrilineal household have now lost their significance (Nongbri, 1994:185). Influence of the Christianity is tremendous upon the Garos of Mandigaon. All of them are now converted to Christianity, and the Mission located in the village has direct influence on their social and spiritual life. Even to some people the village is known as Mariamnagar. Christianity, as a religion favors patiliny, and other than Khasia, all non-Garo Christians of Bangladesh are patrilineal. For the Garos of Mandigaon, advent of Christianity opened up an opportunity to establish a sense of belonging with other non-Garo Christians of Bangladesh and other parts of the world. As a result, psychologically they are induced to accept many things from their patrilineal brothers.

In Mariamnagar area, other than change to a new religion, the Missionaries had introduced Garos to formal education and health care programs. Initially it was very difficult for them to provide health services in all villages due to the problem of distance and limited number of sisters. There was no health center or sisters in the Boibadha Mission. At that time some sisters coming from Baromari Mission (established in 1942 at about 8 miles north to Baoibadha Mission, and now located at Nalitabari) rendered service to patients. That was also limited to a few villages and in one or two occasions in a year. Subsequently when Mission shifted to present location at Mariamnagar, a health center was established and now the Mission has twelve sisters.

The Mission has established Mariamnagar Junior High School and Maramnagar Chatholic Primary School in the village. Over the years, the schools have been producing numbers of literate and educated people. Along with Garos, other community people of the area have also been benefited with the schools. Education played a crucial role in the social and economic progress of the Mandigaon Garos. It changed perception and outlook of them and offered new prospects of employment. It has implication on residence pattern of the Mandigaon Garos that I have discussed earlier. Most of the educated male members desire to form a separate household after marriage, as they prefer to live an independent life.

The role of Christian Missions to the economic uplift of the Garos has not received much attention. We now turn our attention to this as material has recently become available for study (Syiemlieh, 2003:175). Garos were poor and struggling with unequal circumstances living among the Bangali people. Chronic indebtedness to the moneylenders was one of the major problems. In this situation, to improve economic condition of the Garos some experiments had been made by missionaries in some places such as arrangements of cash loans, establishment of 'Rice Bank'. Syiemlieh (2003) describes the system of Rice Bank as under:

"Once stocked in the Mission barn the rice would remain untouched and when the season for sowing would arrive – instead of taking loans with very high interest rates from money lenders, the villagers could receive a loan of rice on their bond to return at the next harvest to the mission one and half *mounds* for every *mound* borrowed. The rice bank were also open for non-Christian neighbours of the Garos who could draw from the rice banks on condition of returning one and three quarter mounds of rice for every mound borrowed" (ibid: 176).

Following the operational concepts of such endeavors in some other areas, Father Charles Young of Mariamnagar Mission introduced a rice bank in the area through cooperative system. A granary was constructed to stock harvested rice. In this process, the mission had stocked more than one hundred mounds of rice in the granary. Ultimately, it appeared difficult to maintain such a big granary in the mission. In 1964 all stocked rice was sold and a Credit Union was formed with the money of sold rice. The union had continued until 1971, and it abolished thereafter (Chiran, 2001:14). Upto a certain period, this rice credit program helped Garos towards self-reliance and refrained them from resorting to moneylenders. This is one of the contributing factors for speedy conversion of Garos to Christianity in the area.

## **7.2 Influence of Patrilineal People**

The Garos and the Khasis or Khasias are two matrilineal ethnic communities of Bangladesh. According to a legend (see chapter-II: 2.6) they were patrilineal before; matrilineality was a later development among them. Fuller (1909) suggested that probably Garos had copied the matrilineal system from the neighboring Khasis. We have no sufficient evidences in hand to support this story of transformation of the early Garo social organization, yet it helps us to gather an idea about early cultural contact among ethnic groups. Even, about one and half a century back Dalton (1872) distinguished Garos between 'uncivilized' and 'Hinduaized'. Playfair (1909) categorically made a distinction between hill Garos and plains Garos and observed plains Garos belong to a different category and have lost many of their tribal characteristics. These ethnographic evidences help our understanding that

cultural contact of the Garos with plains dwelling people had started long before the process of integration initiated by the British colonial rulers.

It is difficult to ascertain when Mandigaon Garos became susceptible to other culture. Once in the village, agriculture was the only source of income. However, my informants say that people of Mandigaon never practiced *jhum*, since the land of the village was not suitable for this type of cultivation. Rather Garos of Mandigaon have been accustomed with wet rice cultivation since they first settled here. At that time, only Hajongs were living in the village. It seems more likely that Garos first learned ploughing land and growing wet rice from them. One of my informants told that he came in the village as a groom in the early forties and found a few Garo families living around the present Mariamnagar School area, whereas number of Hajong was many. The area was then mostly covered with forests. Yet, a large area remained open and suitable for rice cultivation. Subsequently, Garos settled in the area increasingly as the place was found proper for living. In the early days there was no Muslim population in the area. Other than small ethnic groups, people of surrounding areas were lower caste Hindus.

Mymensingh district came under the authority of Muslim rulers in the beginning of 14th century A.D. during the reign of Sultan Shamsuddin Feroz Shah (1301-1322). However, it took time to establish control over all parts of the district. During the period of Alauddin Feroz Shah the whole area was incorporated under Muslim authority. J.P Wise in his notes on "Muslims in Bengal" says that till the date of census of 1872 it was not known that Muslims predominated in East Bengal ((Mymensingh District Gazetteer, 1978: 53). Indeed, during the time of the establishment of Muslim control

over the area Muslims started coming. They came with saints as their followers or with Muslim military generals. They settled down among the local people and increased in numbers over the centuries. Now, Muslims constitute majority population of Sherpur.

Garos before being converted to Christianity lived side by side or close to Muslims and Hindus over the centuries. Koch, Hajong, Dalu, Rajbangshi, Banai, Hodi--- all their non-Bangali neighbors became Hinduized long before. In some areas of India process of Sanskritization was evident in the lifestyle of the Garos (Syiemlieh, 2003: 173). Yet in Mymensingh area, neither Garos were drawn to Hinduism in a great number nor were they converted to Islam. Christianity came with a third option and won over them subsequently.

Although, in the context of religion, Garos have been able to maintain separate identity in many aspects of their social life, the influence of the Bangali neighbors is overwhelming upon them. Both the Hindu and Muslim of Bangladesh by language and ethnicity belong to Bangali race. Except Borogajni, now there is no absolute Garo village in Jhenaigati. All other villages have mixed population like Mandigaon. Everywhere Garos are living alongside Bangalis. Their presence and influence in the day-to-day living of the Garos are profound in every sphere of their life. Influence of neighboring culture and forces of modernity are now so integrated with their way of life that they cannot escape changes in any way in the present circumstances. Their house building pattern, dress, food habits, language, behavior pattern, everything changed largely. Garo villagers of Mandigaon are now bilingual. In household affairs, their own language *abeng* is used. But Bangla is commonly used for other purpose. Thousands of Bangla

words have entered to all dialects of Garos, and one can easily communicate with them in Bangla.

Bangali Influence and wave of urbanization have changed considerably the nature of housing structure and material used in the village. Now it is frequently seen that they are using brick, cement, CI sheet, bamboo, hay/straw, mud and other materials for house construction. Mud houses with CI sheet are more common in the village followed by straw houses. Except a little difference in pattern and structure, Garo houses are almost similar with the Bangalis. The only difference I have noticed in the structure is that roof tops of Garo houses constructed by CI sheet or straw is apparently flat in nature, while roof tops of Bangali houses generally are shaped somewhat higher.

Garos have different dress style. Traditionally Garo men wear a small piece of loin cloth, known as *Gando* (langti), but now they put on *lungi*, pant and trousers instead of *gando*. Garo women are often seen dressed with *sari* and *kamiz* instead of customary wraparound skirts. Even the traditional style of cooking has mostly disappeared; they now use *masala* (spice) of different types following Bangali recipe. They are also introduced to dishes like *polau* (spicy rice), *korma* (curry). The small material objects of daily life are no longer different from those of their Bangali neighbors (Burling, 1997: 228).

Both Bangali Muslims and Hindus are patrilineal and their residence pattern is patrilocal where after marriage sons stay in their natal house and bring in their wives. The Bangalis consider going as son-in-law is a kind of male

dishonor, and who do so are often treated differently. The husband living in wife's parent's house, the Bangalis call him *ghar jamai*. Garos are well aware of Bangali attitude towards matrilocality. Living in and surrounded by men's world, Garos cannot ignore male bias of residence choice. A growing number of young Garos seem to dislike traditional practice of going as son-in-law to their bride's parents' house. Some of them have shown their resentment by saying that this practice makes Garo males idle. Since, in wife's house, they have less authority over family affairs, less access over land and other resources, they feel little interest in performing other duties rather than spending time in gossiping or drinking *chu*. However, this cannot be generalized in case of all male Garos. I have seen in Mandigaon that during daytime while women were working in the field or in the house, some male Garos were sitting idle or enjoying *chu* with other male neighbors. Others were as usual engaged in productive works. Some young Garos of Mandigaon think that in the system of matrilocality residence pattern, a Garo male cannot utilize all of his work-potentials, and this is one of the reasons of their present backwardness. Even some of them feel that this system makes men dependent on their wives' since in their wives' family men are deprived of property rights. He cannot claim right over any property and cannot exercise authority over any family affairs. In a matrilocality pattern, they only play the role of caretakers who looks after wives' property, if property is not acquired otherwise. Here ownerships of land and access to resources are crucially implicated to their residence choice. More and more Garos are opting for patrilocal choice as it helps them to get a share of parental property.



### 7.3 Social Mobility, Education and Work

Once in the area, Garos lived in seclusion and mostly in clustered settlements. Physical mobility was limited to those areas of their own people's settlement. Now increasingly they are open to the larger society. Level of exposure and interaction with patriarchal societies worked as a reason for their shift from many matrilineal practices.

In the early days, some frontier markets were the only contact points with members of other ethnic communities and plain-dwelling people. In those days agriculture was their main occupation. With a few exception Mandigaon Garos were also agriculturists. There were a few carpenters and blacksmiths in the village. Trading was confined mostly to exchange of agricultural products and goods in the frontier markets. Cotton was the most important trade good. Besides, they traded chilies, wax and timber in the markets. Nearest market was in Dakabor, where Nolkura Union Parishad office is now located. Another market was in Nayagaon, some three kilometers away from the village. Afterwards another market named as Ghosgaon, was established at the north side of present Jhenaigati *bazaar*. Later on Ghosgaon *bazaar* has been renamed as Jhenaigati *bazaar*. All these markets were located near Moharishi river. Since there was no road communication at that time, people had to cross the river, and country boats were the only means of communication to reach those markets. Garos of Mandigaon never produced cotton. In the past, cotton was produced amply in the Garo Hills. Garos of the Garo Hills used to visit frontier markets to sell cotton and other products. They carried dry food and rice with them as because sometimes it took two days to reach the markets. Paddy was the main selling commodity of the villagers of Mandigaon. At that time, the

price of one *mound* of paddy was eight *anna* to one *taka*. In exchange of paddy, the Garos used to buy salt, kerosene, dried fish, tobacco, cattle, goat, pig, clothes, earthenwares, pots etc. They could conveniently raise cows and goats since many open places and pastures were available during that period. Now the nearest market is located in Varua, an adjacent village of Mandigaon. For more shopping, they now prefer to go to Jhenaigati *bazaar*.

With the change of social and economic pattern, social mobility of the Garos has increased. Social contact with their own people living far away from the village has augmented over the time; as a result, marriage within the village has decreased substantially. Increased numbers of males and females are now moving out of the village for the purpose of employment and education. They pay visit to the village at interval or at the time of official holidays. When they return, they bring along with them different norms and values of other cultures, mainly of patriarchal values, which after mixing with traditional norms and values give shape to a different cultural set-up.

Since the 1960, Garos have started migrating to big cities such as Dhaka and Chittagong. However, Dhaka was more preferred to them. The need for jobs has induced both men and women to leave their villages. Others have come to big cities for higher education. A good number of city-dwelling Garos are student now. More and more boys and girls are coming to Dhaka to study in the colleges or the universities located in the capital city. They live with relatives or stay in student's hostel there. They are much better acquainted with and integrated into Bengali society than their parents in the village (Bal, 2001:54).

Education is another crucially interlinked factor in influencing choice of residence and determining gender role and position of men and women in a society. In the present circumstances, educated people no longer want to stay in villages, and people of Mandigaon are no exception. City life is more attractive than to live in a village. Everywhere in the developing world, structurally a village cannot accommodate educated persons other than those in the profession of teachers in schools or colleges, and scopes to be accommodated in such professions are very limited. Therefore, for better prospect of employment one must move out of villages. Mandigaon Garos are comparatively better educated than the neighboring people. The village has the highest literacy rate in the Upazila. Although number of persons graduated or received higher education are negligible, they too move out of the village for better future. It appears from the finding that trends of patrilocality are observed more among urban-living couples compared to them who are living in rural areas. It is perhaps because of the reason that the educated and employed Garos are in a position to think and make choice independently.

Garo women are more independent in their household work and social life. There is no restriction in their movement. While ideas of purity and pollution have a serious impact upon Bangali culture, Garos are not barred by such social prohibition. They are always free not only to move about their own villages, but to travel to other villages as well (Burling 1997:49). We have seen in early discussion that a good number of Garo women of Mandigaon are employed outside. They are engaged in different types of

jobs, mostly in the beauty parlors of Dhaka. They earn relatively more than any other jobs. They have been maintaining regular or occasional contact with the village and send money to their parents. An earning member of a family always has an upper hand in household affairs. He or she can make choice independently. Growing numbers of love marriages among urban couples can be noted as examples of individual's independence.

#### **7.4 Urbanization and Mass Media**

Urbanization by no means is consistently linked with residence pattern. In many parts of the world individual's preferences become increasingly neolocal as societies have urbanized. Urbanization may cause break down of household based economics, the fragmentation of kin networks through migration and erosion in tradition of family support. Urbanization associated with other social and cultural factors including exposure to media seems to play important role in shaping Garo attitude and life style. Process of urbanization clearly contributes in lessening dependence on agricultural activities. Urbanization is also associated with increased access to education. Mandigaon is a rural village and not urbanized in the sense of access to all urban facilities. However, one can feel the touch of wave of urbanization in it.

The village has good road links with the upazila headquarter. One can buy necessary household items without spending much time. Even one can buy urbanized commodity like soft drinks, chips or mineral water (so called) from nearby shops in the village. In the recent years, a visible revolution has

taken place in telecommunication sector. All districts of Bangladesh now have been interlinked with mobile phone (cell phone) network. Some Garos in the village have mobile phones and they can easily communicate with their relatives living outside the village. The only major problem they face with electricity, since the village is not exposed to it. Mission has its own generator. Some affluent Garos use batteries to watch TV. Some have cassette player and other equipments for entertainment.

Few Garos read newspapers regularly. All national dailies of Bangladesh are Dhaka based. It takes hardly five hours to reach newspapers from Dhaka to Jhenaigati, another half an hour is needed to get newspaper in the village. However, poor Garos are not exposed to mass media to that extent.

Change in lifestyle always invites change from traditional pattern. Process of urbanization associated with other factors changed Garo lifestyle substantially. Although agriculture is still the main source of income in the village, it is observed that dependence on it has decreased in the recent times. On the other hand trend of migration to big cities in search of better jobs has increased. Garo couples, in the perspective of village or family attachment may be regarded as matrilocal or patrilocal, but city dwelling couples in practice, are living in neolocal urban set up.

### **7.5 Technological Changes**

In respect of the Garos or other peripheral small hill dwelling communities, technological changes are always explained in the light of post-jhuming agriculture. In the traditional tribal society, the predominant mode of

productive activity was *jhum* cultivation. The system depends on active participation of women in performing certain specific functions related to slash and burn cultivation. The division of work between men and women in the system was well defined (Ganguly, 1993:68). It is held by many that plough cultivation is another backlash to their traditional culture. With the introduction of new mode of agriculture, traditional division of labor between the sexes in the family has changed greatly (Majumder, 1985: 298). In the Jhumia society women are directly or indirectly and integrally associated with the running of system of production, therefore they are not economically dependent on men. But in plough cultivation women's activities in the household have been reduced to the performance of domestic works (Ganguly, 1993:71). In general, it is held that women in tribal societies enjoy a higher status than their non-tribal counterparts. This suggestion has some bearing about those communities who once practiced Jhum cultivation. To the Garos of Mandigaon this is only a tradition. In the village, division of labor between sexes was never characterized by this ancient mode of production, neither technological change worked as a factor of change to that extent compared to Jhumia society. However, at present it is observed that a gradual change is undergoing in the method of plough cultivation. Various types of rice are introduced now to the farmers and sowing and transplanting of these varieties of paddies need some professional skills--knowledge about the use of modern inputs like pesticides and chemical fertilizers. It reduces traditional female skill, knowledge and approach in rice production. For example, very recently, maize cultivation is introduced in the village with the technical help of Agriculture Department.

This is a shift from traditional rice cultivation, and needs different inputs, knowledge and professional skills. Another important technological transformation in ploughing agricultural land is underway in the change from ox to power tiller. Several power tillers are seen using by the farmers in the village. Following the observation of field visit in some areas of Mekhong and Laos, it is suggested by Sandbergen and Qutaki (1995) that this technological innovation increase male dominance in agrarian production as it changes the division of labor, and general idea is that only men can work with the power tiller (1995, Internet version).

### **7.6 GO and NGO Initiatives**

Garos are now in a process of integration with the broader matrix of Bangladesh society. Influences of state run activities are evident in many respects on their lives. Garos are a separate people in terms of religious and ethnic identity, but very much recognized as citizens of Bangladesh. They are voters and can cast their votes in favor of their candidates in the parliament and local government elections. There are tribal quotas for employment in government offices and for admission in public colleges and universities. Central Government works in the local level through upazila based government and semi-government departments and different local bodies. In Bangladesh every upazila has different government departments such as Police, Agriculture, Education, Health, Sanitation, Livestock, Fisheries, Engineering, Youth Development, Social Welfare, Land Administration, Women Affairs, Rural Development and Cooperatives, Ansar and VDP (Village Defence Party) etc. With close coordination of Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) they perform administrative, regulatory and development activities. Most of the development related departments have

their own fieldworkers who motivate, train and help people in their socio-economic development activities. Some departments have their loan programs targeted to poverty reduction and rural development. Among local bodies, Union Parishad is directly related to grass root people, which has one elected Chairman, nine ward members and three women members.

Responsibilities of the Union Parishad are manifold including maintenance of law and order and implementation of government programs at local level. Mandigaon Garos are not exposed to all activities run by government; sometimes their presence is invisible in many sectors. However, a large activities run by government departments and union parishad reached the village, and Garos too are beneficiaries of those initiatives.

Other than Government agencies, in Mandigaon a numbers of NGOs are engaged in the field of poverty alleviation, education, environment healthcare and human development (see chapter-IV: 4.11). Micro credit programs of GO and NGOs do not always prove to be effective as many loan receivers tend to use it for the purpose of house building or other household activities. However, some recipients used loans effectively for productive purpose and improved their economic conditions. In some cases, GO and NGO initiatives demonstrated success particularly in the field of agricultural production, education, reproductive healthcare etc. Most of the households have their own tube wells. The area is Arsenic free and tube wells are the source of drinking water. EPI coverage among the Garos is more than 100%. Although literacy rate among Garos is very high, the



school located in the village does not receive government funding. NGOs, mainly World Vision, Caritas under their education program support students through special stipends/scholarships and financial assistance (admission fees, exam fees, yearly fees) and supply of educational materials.

Government and NGO run activities have no direct relation with the changing trend of residence pattern of the Garos. Nor it has any direct influence on their matrilineality or inheritance. Nevertheless, there is always a conflict between tradition and development, as development always comes with innovations, ideas and options. Development in other words means a progressive shift from backward tradition. On the other hand, all development activities seem to promise a better life, but when they come too fast, they can threaten societies' own sense of traditional continuity (Burling, 1997:205).

## **Chapter-VIII**

### **Conclusion**

This research focuses mainly on three interrelated issues: residence, gender and power. Every society has its own residence pattern, and it has implication on their social organization and kinship system. Implications of residence in shaping social relations between male and female in a society are always considered crucial, and involve many other factors of material and social basis of human life. For the Garos, who until today follows a matrilineal kinship system of descent and inheritance, and where residence is an indicator of matrilineality, the implications of the changes of residence pattern are more significant compared to any other kin-based patrilineal societies of the world.

Matrilineality as a system has inherent contradictions and the 'puzzle' exists very much within the role attributed to male and female in the society. When a society approves diverse types of residence pattern within its own kinship framework or social structure, gender role and power relations can not be analyzed through any preconceived ideas or traditional anecdotes, rather social and economic consideration also come up in the process of understanding. In view of this, in this study an attempt has been made to investigate into the process of change in the residence pattern of the Garos in the light of traditional society and present situation. In doing so, both historical and anthropological perspectives have been used to analyze empirical and qualitative data gathered from intensive fieldwork, oral histories, informal interview, and through case study methods.

Although Garos in general share a common kinship system, Garos (Mandi) of Bangladesh are different in many respects from the Garos of Garo Hills in India. They have different social, economic and political characteristics. However, most of the ethnographic writings on the Garos by British officials and professional anthropologists from India or outside were concerned about hill Garos of Indian part. Unfortunately, no significant research was conducted on the plain-Garos.

Literature on the Garos of Bangladesh part is still inadequate. The process of writing on the Garos of Bangladesh mainly has developed after the independence of the country. Since then Garo and non-Garo writers have written many books and articles. Most of these writings are of general type. Until recently, we have only few books written by professional anthropologists, which provided a conceptual tool in understanding present day Garos of Bangladesh.

These literary works examined the process of change in the Garo society in the light of traditional practice, family and kinship, gender role, inheritance etc. They analyzed different external factors such as Christianity, education, new technology, change in land ownership pattern and influence of the plains in this respect. Some of them observed that although influence of Christianity had been profound upon Garos, it had little direct effect on their matrilineal kinship principles. They suggested that changes happened in Garo family pattern were due more to the development of individual land ownership and patrilineal influence than Christianity. They further observed that although matrilineal pattern of property ownership and inheritance

continued to dominate, matrilineal social organization gave way to patrilineal social organization.

Residence pattern of the Garos of Bangladesh was not given central importance in any anthropological work before. However, residence was discussed as one of the aspects of social organization, and some of them mentioned about the existence of various types of residence pattern prevailing among Garos of Bangladesh. Matrilocality, which is traditional Mandi practice, was observed predominant among them, but increased evidences of shift towards patrilocal residence were also observed. These literatures suggested that choice of patrilocal residence pattern was, to some extent, related to kinship requirements. Thus, patrilocal residence no longer was considered as violation of kinship rule, rather the practice was approved by the society. Kinship requirement is that a man brings her wife with him because women of his own lineage need to have a male relative's support. And a young man is more likely to take better care of his own parent's family than that of his wife. Other reasons behind the change in residence pattern were social and economic in nature.

The area, where the study village is located was neither studied before from the point of view of ethnography or anthropology, nor was any historical documents of migration and early settlement of the Garos in the area available. In the dearth of available literature, to understand ethnogenesis of the Garos and outcome of various interacting social, economic and political process in the area, early administrative and ethnographic accounts of British Indian officials and subsequent anthropological literature, census reports, and other relevant document were also used.

Chapter-I is the introductory chapter; it includes aim, rationale and problem statement, and objectives of the study. It also deals with different methods used for the research work and provides a review on available literature related to Garo affairs.

Chapter-II presents a brief historical overview of the Garos with a transitional profile of their social organization. For the purpose of outlining key characteristics of the study people, a general overview along with changing circumstances of their matrilineal social organizations, such as origin of matrilineality, clan groups and sub-groups, kinship, marriage, inheritance, and related other issues like post-marital residence pattern, status of women and men etc were discussed. An analysis of transition of Garo social organization shows that process of change in their kinship system had initiated long before, and in course of time they adjusted and accommodated with many things. Some of the changes were situational and some were conscious development. Changes happened partly because of better integration and continuity of the tribe, partly with the influence of external factors.

Chapter-III deals with regional background of the study area. While introducing the study area, a brief history, and description of location and physical environment of Sherpur district and Jhenaigati sub-district with an analysis of past and present ethnic situation of the area were presented. In the discourse we have seen how the process of cultural contact among different ethnic groups shaped the nature of indigenous culture in the region.

From the time immemorial, Sherpur has been a place of ethnic diversity and indeed, the face of the indigenous culture of Sherpur was marked with the

presence of people from different ethnicity. Apart from Bangali (Muslim and Hindu), other ethnic groups who inhabited the area were Hajong, Garo, Koch, Banai, Dalu, Hodi, Rajbansi, Mech and Mandai. These small ethnic people mostly lived in remote rural areas or at the fringe of Garo Hills. Past ethnic situation shows that in the process of cultural contact with Muslims and Hindus, many small communities like Dalu, Hodi etc. lost their true significance as a different ethnic group. Their number of population also has decreased over the time in such an extent that might lead to their extinction as a community in future. Most of these ethnic groups are now integrated with the Hinduism. Surprisingly only Garos have been able to maintain a distinct matrilineal kinship structure. They absorbed many things from others, but at the same time escaped conversion to either Islam or Hinduism. Rather, they were converted to Christianity, which worked as a means to maintain their separate entity.

A considerable number of ethnic communities lived in the past, but present situation provides us information about the existence of a few and merger or non-existence of some others. In different stages of the history, small ethnic people of Sherpur as well as north Mymensingh area confronted with some unwanted situation, which ultimately changed the character of the ethnic population of north Mymensingh region. As a result, present situation shows the existence of less number of small ethnic populations in the district compared to the past. However, they are found living in many places of the district. Jhenaigati Upazila, where the study village is located, has a large number of small ethnic population, among them Garos are predominant.

In chapter-IV, along with a general description of the village, a comparative analysis is presented about the socio-economic condition of the people of three ethnic communities living in the study village. We have seen in the analysis that despite many similarities, the Garos of the village are different in many respects compared to other communities.

Mandigaon has a mixed population of three ethnic groups: Bangali Muslim, Garo and Hajong. At present, Bangali Muslims are the majority followed by Garo and Hajong. In the past, Mandigaon was absolutely a tribal village and there was no Muslim population. It was populated only by Hajong and Garo in the past. Most of the Hajongs left the village in several occasions mainly after the communal disturbances of 1964 and migrated to India. On the other hand Bangali Muslim refugees from Assam and other areas came in numbers and rehabilitated in Mandigaon and other surrounding ethnic minority villages. Now only a few Hajongs are living in the village. All Garos of the village are Christians, while all Hajongs are Hindus. In Mandigaon, except one, all Garos are now Catholic.

It is estimated in different statistics that in Bangladesh about 60% of households are effectively landless. For the purpose of the present study a census carried out by the author reveals that 58.46% households are landless in the village. The percentage is almost similar compared to the national average. Findings show that in the village Muslim landless people are greater in number than Garos. Percentage of marginal households is almost same among the three communities, but number of households with large land holding size (5.00+) is more among Garos than the Muslims. Their household size is also larger than average Bangali Muslims families.

Existence of greater number of large families among Garos is the manifestation of their strong family bond and kinship relations.

Agriculture is the main source of income of the villagers as usual. About half of the population of the village directly dependent on agriculture and agriculture related activities for their subsistence, and dependence on agriculture among three communities are almost same. Occupational distribution of the Garos differs substantially from the Muslims. The most striking difference exists between these two communities in the service sector. For instance, service is the principle income source of 36.49% Garo households. On the other hand among Muslims number of service holder is only a few (4.55%).

Chapter-V exclusively deals with the Garos of the study village and focuses on several aspects of their present socio-economic condition, kinship and social organization. Findings show that kinship still occupies central position in their social organization. Garos of Mandigaon are mainly divided into two kinship-based exogamous groups: *Sangma* and *Marak*. There are a few *Momin* in the village. These groups (*chatchi*) have many sub-groups (*ma'chong*). Each of the sub-group is affiliated with one of the three clans (*chatchi*). Findings from the village, however, give a picture of localized variations in this respect. This variation in clan affiliation indicates that affiliation of *ma'chong* members with any of the clans sometimes can vary depending upon place and circumstances.

Attitude of the Garos towards marriage has been changed significantly in the present circumstances. In Mandigaon, it is observed that now-a-days they do not follow all ceremonies and customs of their traditional marriage system.



Nevertheless, some traditional marriage practices still exist. Marriages in the village generally are performed in the mission according to the Christian law. It is observed that young couples are becoming less interested to be a *nokna* (heiress daughter) or *nokrom* (husband of *nokna*) and the number of such marriages is decreasing substantially. At present, replacement or *jik'gite* marriages is being discouraged in the community. In Mandigaon, few cases are found where Garo got married to Muslims, Hindus, or Bangali Christians. They do not approve this type of marriage even today.

Apart from some deviations, the trend of marriage among the Garos of Mandigaon is still exogamous in nature. Although they are restricted to marry within their own clan, this rule is not strictly followed by them nowadays. For example, some couples are found in Mandigaon where husband and wife belong to the same clan (*chatchi*), but their sub-groups (*ma'chongs*) are different. It appears that they no longer consider clan endogamy as a violation; rather they are inclined to approve it in their kinship structure. However, marriage within same *ma'chong* is still prohibited, and they tend to follow this rule strictly.

Love marriages are also growing in numbers. This trend, no doubt, signifies changing attitudes of young Garos. There are, of course, rural urban variations; arranged marriages are more in number among older couples in the village, while city dwelling young Garos seem more willing to select their partners by themselves.

There is a Christian Mission in the area, named Mariamnagar Mission, established in 1951. This is the biggest Catholic Mission in Sherpur, and has spiritual and religious control over 43 Garo villages in Sherpur and Jamalpur

district. Education program undertaken by the Mission in the area proved to be a far-reaching initiative. The Mission has established one Primary School and one Junior High school in the village. Its effects have been direct on the socio-economic pattern of the Garos of the village as well as others of adjoining areas. With this, number of educated Garos gradually has increased. As a result, Garos of the village now have the highest percentage of literacy rate in Jhenaigati. In the Junior High School number of Garo female students are found more than males. This impressive data reveals that women are in a better position in terms of education.

In chapter-VII, research findings on present residence pattern of the Garos in the village and its impact on gender role and power are presented and analyzed. In chapter- VIII a few factors responsible for social, economic and cultural changes among them such as Christianity, introduction to formal education, change in the mode of agriculture and land ownership system, influence of patrilineal people, urbanization and mass media, work and income, development initiatives of the Government and NGOs and etc. are discussed and analyzed.

Change in residence pattern among Garos is not an isolated occurrence. A number of factors have been involved in the process of change in their social organization. Garo society has its own logic in accepting changes in a diverse socio-economic and cultural surrounding, which in turn may work as reasons for change in the residence pattern. On the other hand, change in residence pattern is also responsible for creating other prerogatives, which do not always match with the traditional norms and values of Garo matrilineality. This creates a situation where structural conflicts among different social organizations among Garos are increasing gradually, in

which many options in relation to social and economic development of individual and group members are being considered. When other cultures are dominant and isolation as a community from others is almost impossible due to social and economic inter-dependence, it is unwise to think that Garos would continue to live in a traditional enclosure as prescribed by many in the past, and some at present. In the present circumstances, Garos are in a real dilemma between lines of tradition and modernity. Perhaps this situational quandary has been an unending process in the lives of every small and marginal community people.

An analysis of present situation of the Garos of Mandigaon village indicates a process of rapid change in many aspects of their social organization such as marriage, residence, and inheritance, although propinquity to kinship principles remains. The findings of the study show that change in residence pattern has been a continuous process in the Garo society and its implications on gender role and power are very strong. The principal conclusions are as follows:

1. Residence in the village is flexible and different types of post-marital residence choice are approved by the society. Matrilocal pattern is the ideal type and still predominant in the village; however, patrilocal and neolocal are observed as increasing in a rapid way. Households in a joint family structure of the Garos, in the most cases, are observed living in the state of both matrilocal and patrilocal setting. Although in such a situation, structural conflicts arise in respect of adjustment, gender role, power and identity of spouses, society tends to accommodate many things in the framework of matrilineal kinship system.

2. There is a difference between ideal and actual arrangements in respect of residence and in between interplay different considerations. Social, economic and psychological considerations are mostly the outcome of the influence of external factors and kinship requirements. Kinship considerations are characterized by male bias, and evolve out of the necessity of male support in the family.

3. Trend of change projects that patrilocality and neolocality are more common among young generation couples. Instances of different choice are also observed among older generation couples, but the numbers are less compared to young generation couples. There is also rural urban variation. Preference of patrilocal residence is more prevalent among urban living couples than the Garos living in the village. Urban dwelling couples generally are quite young. The trend represents a change in outlook in residence among young Garos.

4. There is a very strong correlation between residence and inheritance. Parent's discretion regarding transmission of property mainly depends on choice of residence. Traditional rules of inheritance only work to that extent where choice of residence makes no difference regarding access to resources and kin-support. Son's preference in relation to transmission of property has been an increasing trend. This is no doubt a fundamental shift from matrilineal principle. Furthermore, it appeared that traditional inheritance pattern is at a stake. A radical attitude has been developed over the time among young Garos in favor of change in inheritance rules. If this trend continues, future shape of inheritance pattern may take a new turn.

5. Implications of residence are significant on gender roles and power among Garos. Village identity and household identity always makes a difference in respects of gender role and access to resources. However, gender role in households appeared quite balanced since matrilineal kinship principles still work as organizing force of social organization.

6. In spite of the existence of inherent contradictions concerning the power and authority in the matrilineal structure of the Garos, authority of male in household decision-making is inherent irrespective of residence choice. Patrilocal residence choice adds new dimension to it, where men enjoy more authority than they have in matrilineal surroundings. Women's position and status in a patrilocal pattern become subordinate and their roles obviously have been confined to household works. For all material and social basis of life a woman in a patrilocal pattern is dependent on her male counterpart.

7. Residence is crucially interlinked with number of internal and external factors. Garos of the village are susceptible to other culture, and influences of Christianity and surrounding patrilineal people are profound in their lives. Besides, education, employment, process of urbanization, exposure to mass media and GO and NGO activities are important variables in determining residence choice of the couples.

Although, post-marital residence and its implications on gender role and power among Garos are the focus of my study, residence pattern is also observed significantly related to other aspects of the Garo matrilineality. Until today kinship remains as the main organizing strength of Garo society

in respect of clan organization, descent, exogamous marriage and lineage attachment to mothers. A shift in residence pattern means a shift from many things of traditional practice. Increased instances of change towards patrilocal and neolocal residence choice mean increased change in the inheritance pattern and other aspects of Garo social organization. It gives rise to many questions concerning future shape of Garo matrilineality. Change in residence has an enduring significance, and in the course of time, the change, no doubt will infuse more patrilineal values and norms in Garo life. In such a situation what will be the future appearance of Garo society? How long would they continue to follow unilineal descent rule of mother's line or prefer to take mother's lineage name living in father's natal village or household? My presumption is that Garo situation would take a more complex shape in future than to be explained in broad line suggestions of society's movement towards patrilineality. However, these questions remain unanswered in this study for future anthropological quest.

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## Appendix-A

### Definitions and Concepts

- Avunculocal** : refers to the rule of residence in some matrilineal societies where by a man and his wife take residence with the man's maternal uncle.
- Ambilocal**: refers to the rule of residence where by couple may reside with either the husbands or the wife's groups.
- Clan**: a kinship group whose members assumes, but need not demonstrate, descent from a common ancestor.
- Cross cousins**: children of a brother or of a sister.
- Extended family**: expanded household including two or three generations.
- Descent**: a relationship defined by connection to an ancestor (or ancestress) through a culturally recognized sequence of parent-child links (from father to son to son's son= patrilineal descent, or from mother to daughter to daughter's daughter=matrilineal descent)
- Dulocal**: there are no common households. Spouses remain in their own natal groups.
- Fictive kinship**: a relationship such as god parenthood, modeled on relations of kinship, but created by customary convention rather than the circumstances of birth.
- Joint family**: consist of two or more relatives of the same generation living together with their respective spouse or children.
- Lineage**: unilineal descent group based on demonstrated descent from a common ancestor.
- Matriarchy**: rule of family (and society) by the mother. No strictly matriarchal societies are known.
- Matrilineal**: descent traced exclusively through the female line for the purpose of group membership or inheritance.
- Matrilineage**: unilineal descent group based on matrilineal descent.
- Matrilocal**: matrilocal post marital residence is the residence of the couple with or close to the wife's family, or more specifically the wife's mother. Matrilocality is not necessarily associated with matrilineality, and in order to avoid confusion of the two concepts many anthropologists prefer to use the term 'Uxorilocal' which simply refers to 'residence in the wife's place'.

- Moiety:** a division of society into two social categories or groups, characteristically by a rule of patrilineal descent (patri-moiety) or matrilineal descent (matri-moiety). In other words, one of the two descent groups in a given population.
- Monogamy:** a form of marriage which limits a person to only one spouse at a time.
- Nuclear family:** a family unit consisting of parents and their dependent children.
- Neolocal:** residence of a couple after marriage in a new household not linked spatially to that of the groom's or the bride's kin.
- Patrilineal:** descent traced exclusively through the male line for the purpose of group membership or inheritance.
- Patrilineage:** a unilineal descent group based on patrilineal descent.
- Patrilocal:** a post marital residence rule by which a newly wed couple takes up permanent residence with or near the groom's father's family.
- Pollution:** the act of defilement, uncleanness.
- Polygamy:** a general term for plural marriage, either polygyny or polyandry.
- Ritual:** a set of acts, usually involving religion or magic, following a sequence established by tradition.
- Sample:** a subpopulation that is studied in order to make generalizations.
- Sept:** a non-unilineal descent group.
- Socialization:** the development, through the influence of parents and others, of patterns of thought and behavior in children that conforms to beliefs and values of particular culture.
- Social organization:** a culturally inherited system that orders social relations within social groups.
- Taboo:** a supernaturally forbidden act as defined by culture, violation of which can have severe negative consequences.
- Unilineal descent:** the principle where by descent is traced either through the male line (patrilineal) or the female line (matrilineal).
- Urbanization:** the world wide process of growth of cities at the expense of rural population.
- Uxorilocal:** residence with wife's relatives after marriage.
- Verilocal:** residence with the husband's relatives after marriage.

## Appendix-B

### Glossary of Garo Kinship Terms

- Abi:** elder sister, elder female parallel cousin.  
**Ada:** older brother, older male parallel cousin.  
**Adi, madi:** mother's sister.  
**A'jong:** father's elder brother's wife.  
**Ama:** mother.  
**Ambi:** grandmother.  
**Angsu:** grand child.  
**An'sadu:** wife's sister's husband  
**Anu, non, no:** younger sister.  
**Anu' ni se:** younger sister's husband.  
**Apa:** step mother.  
**A'pa:** father.  
**A'pa-atchu:** father and grandfather.  
**Atchu:** grandfather.  
**A'wang:** father's younger brother, mother's younger sister's husband, step-father.
- Bi'sa:** brother's son.  
**Buji:** elder brother's wife.
- Chatchi:** exogamous group or lineage; a group to which number of *ma'chong* are affiliated.  
**Chawari:** son-in-law.  
**Chra:** male lineage members of women: maternal uncle or brother.
- Demechik:** daughter, brother's daughter.
- Gri:** cross nephew, woman's brother's son, man's sister's son.
- Jik:** wife  
**Jik'gite, Jik'giti:** second wife.  
**Jo'jong, Jong:** younger brother.  
**Jong'sari:** wife's younger brother, husband's younger brother.
- Madi:** mother's younger sister  
**Ma'jong, a'-jong:** mother's older sister, father's older brother's wife, aunt, step mother.  
**Mama:** mother's brother, father-in-law.  
**Mani:** mother-in-law, mother's brother's wife, father's sister.  
**Miabisa:** son.  
**Mi'chikbisa:** daughter.  
**Mo'sa:** mother's brother's son, father's sister's son.

**Namchik:** man's sister's daughter, woman's brother's daughter.

**Nokchik:** women of woman's lineage, female equivalent of chra.

**Nokkrom:** male heir, resident son-in-law.

**No-sari:** wife's younger sister.

**Jikskang:** first wife, former wife.

**O'bide, o'bite:** father-in-law, wife's father.

**Patjong:** father's older brother, mother's older sister's husband.

**Randi:** widow.

**Randa:** widower.

**Sadu:** wife's sister's husband.

**Sari:** sister in law, mother's brother's daughter, father's sister's daughter.

**Sariani:** Mothers-in-law-daughters-in-law, sisters-in-law.

**Se:** husband.

## Appendix-C Glossary of Garo Terms

- Abeng:** a sub-tribe of the Garos  
**A'chak:** dog  
**A'chik:** hill man  
**Aduri:** a musical horn made from a buffalo horn and blown through a long bamboo tube.  
**Agate or Agati:** husband of non-heiress daughter.  
**A'kim:** the permanent bond between the *mahari* of the husband and the wife, own nephew of the father of the family.  
**A'king:** the area of which the ownership right belongs to a particular *mahari*  
**Areng:** name of a Garo *chatchi*  
**Asekki:** star.  
**Atchia:** be born.  
**Atong:** a sub-tribe of the Garos.  
**A'we:** a sub-tribe of the Garos.  
**Azim:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.
- Bacdong:** couples who marry in the same *chatchi*.  
**Bajal:** bazaar.  
**Balwa:** breeze, wind.  
**Balwari:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Bangsi:** flute  
**Bibal:** flower.  
**Bipang:** tree.  
**Biti:** fruit.  
**Bobil:** enemy.  
**Bring:** forest, jungle.
- Chambugong:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Che:** water.  
**Chibima:** river.  
**Chiran:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Chisak:** a sub-tribe of the Garos.  
**Chisam:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Chisim:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Chu:** rice beer.  
**Chu-bitchi:** undiluted rice-beer.  
**Chuppu:** snake.
- Dai:** compensation paid in cash.  
**Dajel:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Dalbot:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Deo:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Deoa:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*

**Dibru:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.

**Dodi:** peacock.

**Do'o, du'u:** birds, esp domestic fowl.

**Dofu:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.

**Dokbanda:** woman's traditional skirt cloth.

**Do'mok:** goat.

**Do'sia:** principal form of Garo traditional marriage; killing a fowl.

**Drang:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.

**Gabil:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.

**Gadila, Aram:** cloud

**Ga'gak:** domestic duck.

**Gama:** pay a fine

**Gando, gandu:** old fashioned man's lion cloth.

**Ghari:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.

**Goera:** thunder god.

**Gominda:** pumpkin.

**Ha'a:** soil.

**Habol:** firewood.

**Hadima:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.

**Hamak:** monkey.

**Hawee:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.

**Jam:** granary, store house.

**Jajong:** moon.

**Jambil:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.

**Jengcham:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.

**Kamal:** priest.

**Khaksi:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*

**Kubi:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.

**Ma'chong:** Garo matrilineal clan group; motherhood.

**Ma'dong:** incest, marriage within the same *ma'chong*

**Mahari:** lineage, name group, group of closely related kins within the *ma'chong*.

**Majhi:** one of the Garo *ma'chong*.

**Mandi, Mande:** human being

**Mangsang:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.

**Mankhin:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*

**Marak:** name of a Garo *chatchi*.

**Ma'su:** cow, cattle.



- Matabeng:** a sub-tribe of the Garos.  
**Matcha:** tiger.  
**Matchi-Dual:** a sub-tribe of the Garos.  
**Matma:** buffalo.  
**Megam:** a sub-tribe of the Garos: occasionally used to indicate a Khasi  
**Menggong:** cat.  
**Mi:** paddy, rice (cooked or uncooked).  
**Mikka:** rain.  
**Millam:** the two edged Garo sword  
**Mimang:** ghost.  
**Misi:** Millet.  
**Mitde:** a god spirit.  
**Momin:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Mongma:** elephant  
**Mree:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Mrong:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.
- Nafak:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*  
**Na'kam:** dry-fish.  
**Nasin:** onion.  
**Nasin du'ki:** garlic.  
**Na'tok:** fish.  
**Nengminja:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Nok:** household.  
**Nokgipa:** owner, the head of the household.  
**Nokma:** owner of the *aking* land, headman of the village, a wealthy man.  
**Nokni skotong:** the head of the household.  
**Nokni padot:** patriarch of a house.  
**Nokpanthe:** bachelor's dormitory.  
**Nokrek:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*  
**Nokrom:** husband of heiress daughter, pillar of the house.  
**Nol:** pig sty, goat shed.  
**Nomil, Mitra:** young girl.
- On'songa:** substituting a wife.
- Paknok:** cook house  
**Pante:** bachelor.  
**Panthra:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Pattang:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.
- Randi:** widow.  
**Randhi mitchu:** widow's tear.  
**Randini nok:** widow's house.  
**Rang:** brass-gong.  
**Raksam:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.

- Rama:** road.  
**Rangsa:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Rema:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Ribbeng:** friend.  
**Richil:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Rokme:** the god of wealth  
**Rongchu:** parched rice  
**Rongchugala:** the first of the series of *wangala* festival.  
**Rongmuthu:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*  
**Ro'ngte:** stone  
**Rua:** axe.  
**Ruga-Chibok:** a sub-tribe of the Garos.  
**Rukho:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Ruram:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.
- Sagal:** sea.  
**Sal:** sun, day.  
**Saljong:** the sun-god, a god who blessed food grains to mankind.  
**Salseka:** separation of spouse by force.  
**Sampal:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Sangma:** name of a Garo *chatchi*.  
**Sangsarek:** traditional religion of the Garos.  
**Si-a-bonna:** death.  
**Silga:** sky.  
**Simsang:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Sira:** name of a Garo *chatchi*  
**Sku:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Snal:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Song:** village.  
**Susmie:** the goddess of wealth.
- Te'brong:** jackfruit.  
**Terik:** banana.  
**Tha-a:** potato.  
**Thigidi:** name of a Garo *ma'chong*.  
**Thusia:** sleep.  
**Tigachu:** mango.
- Wal:** fire, night.  
**Wak:** pig.  
**Wan-ga-la:** the harvest festival

## Appendix-D Glossary of Local Terms

**Abakash:** leisure.

**Amon:** kind of paddy harvested in the winter season.

**Anna:** one-sixteenth part of a Taka

**Aus:** kind of paddy harvested in the rainy season.

**Baro:** big.

**Bazaar:** market.

**Beel:** marsh, vast low-lying area which remains under water for about seven months ( during monsoon) in a year.

**Biboron:** description.

**Borkondaze:** small private army maintained by the Zamindars.

**Boro:** kind of paddy harvested in April.

**Brataya Khatria:** one of the Hindu castes.

**Choto:** small.

**Dol:** group.

**Dhopa:** washer man.

**Fouzdar:** mughal tax collector.

**Ghar Jamai:** house husband.

**Gram:** village.

**Hat:** village market

**Itikatha:** history.

**Jaigirdar:** owner of land.

**Jat:** caste.

**Jhi-Jhi :** crickets.

**Jhinuk:** oyster.

**Kamiz:** female skirt.

**Katcha road:** mud road.

**Kheda:** an enclosure constructed to capture wild elephants.

**Korma:** sweet- testing meat or fish curry.

**Lakheraj/ Niskar:** tax-free.

**Lathiyal:** fighter with sticks.

**Lungi:** men's long lion cloth.

**Mosla:** spices.

**Muktibahini:** freedom fighters of Bangladesh Liberation War.

**Mound:** measure of unit (=40 seers which is about 82 lbs); system of calculating weight.

**Mouza:** revenue village.

**Napit:** barber.

**Pahar:** hill.

**Pagal:** madman.

**Pagalponthi:** followers of madman.

**Pagalai Dhum:** a movement organized by the so-called pagals of Mymensingh area against the oppression of Zamindars and British rulers.

**Para:** cluster of homes in a village

**Pucca road:** melted road.

**Palkibahak:** palanquin bearer.

**Pargana:** revenue district during Mughal period.

**Poita:** sacred thread / cord worn by the first three Hindu castes.

**Polau:** a dish made of rice boiled in soup with spices.

**Raja:** king.

**Sampradaya:** community.

**Samonta:** feudal lord.

**Sanaton:** ancient form of Hinduism.

**Shaal or Gajari:** a kind of tree (*Shorea Robusta*).

**Sari:** woman's lion cloth.

**Salish:** conciliation; arbitration; informal body to settle disputes in the village.

**Taka:** currency of Bangladesh.

**Thana:** police station.

**Upajati:** tribal people.

**Upazila:** sub-district.

**Vaisnava:** one of the sects of modern Hinduism.

**Zamindar:** land lord.

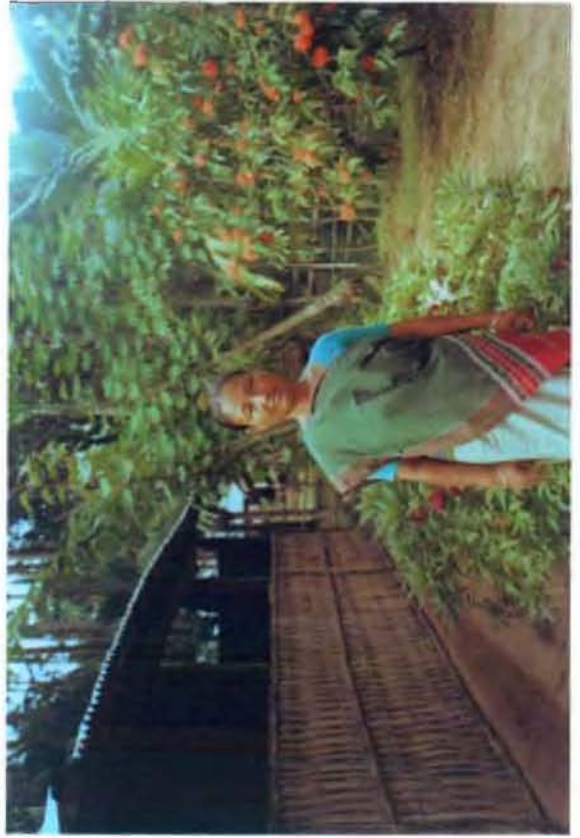
**Zila:** district.

**Zila Parishad:** district council.

## **PHOTOGRAPHS**



A Garo family



A woman in front of her house



A Garo family



Two sisters



Ambi (maternal grand mother) with her daughter's new born child



A young girl



New generation of a joint family.



A boy is taking *mi* (cooked rice) in the morning



An old man enjoying *da-ba*



An old woman smoking *da-ba* (hukka, water pipe)



Children enjoying a tri-cycle ride in school field



Students playing football in school field





Two men drinking *chu* (rice beer) at noon time



*Wan-chi mik-kol* – Old yeast used as seed to make *chu*



Girls dancing during a priestly ordination



Girls with traditional dancing dress



Villagers slicing wak (pig) for festival feast



Roasted wak (pig) for festival feast



Marriage ceremony-couples exchanging garlands before the Father of the Mission



Bride's holy bath before marriage ceremony. According to tradition it makes the bride consecrated for marriage



Pouring *chu* for the guests in a marriage ceremony



Merrymaking during marriage a *sa-ri* (sister-in-law, mother-in law of bride or groom) offering her counterpart *chu*



A woman weeding her rice field



A woman transplanting seedlings



A woman drying paddy in the sun



Two old women weeding *brinjal* (brinjal) field



Two sisters cooking



A girl washing utensils at a tube well



A woman feeding domestic birds



A woman at work in a tailoring shop



A woman shopkeeper



A woman feeding a calf



A man ploughing land



A young man cutting grass for feeding domestic animals



A man fishing in a swamp



A man spreading seeds in the field



A homestead



Nokmadi--a traditional two-roofed long house



A tin shed building



A four-roofed house



A tin shed mud house having thatched roofed small veranda



Ha'bol-nok (wood-shed)



A Kua (open well)



Hay Stacks





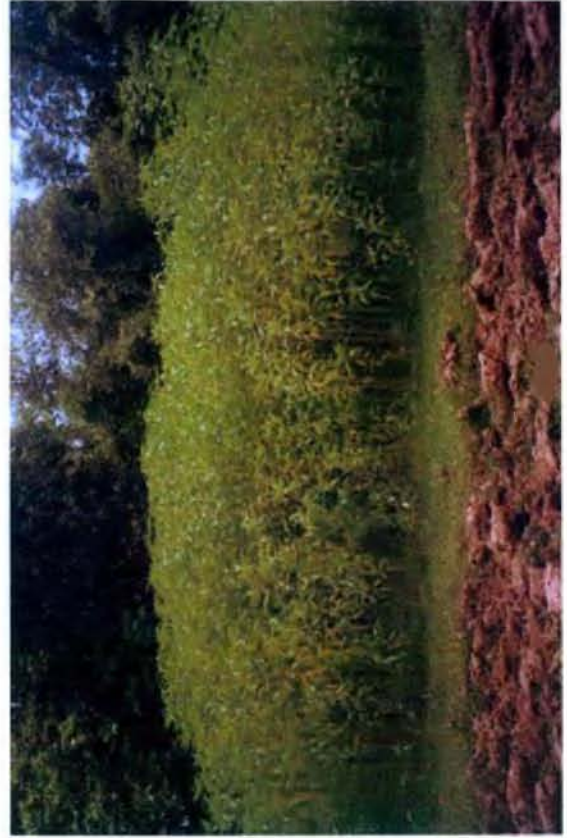
Wak (pig) shed



Buffalos- mainly used for ploughing land



Vegetable garden



Few Garos in the village cultivate jute for household use



A small pond



Moharishi River flows through the western side of the village



A big pond



The sun rising in the village



A village road inside Garo para



A village road inside Garo para



A portion of the main road of the village is melted. It ends just at the entrance of Mariamnagar Mission



Main *katcha* road in the village. It starts near the Mission and joins with the Jhenaigati- Fakrabad road near Moharishi River



A vast tract of agricultural land lies in the middle of the village.  
A distant view of Garo Hills can also be seen from there



Muslim and Hajong *para* at the north eastern part of the village



A Muslim house in the middle of the village



Seedlings are ready for transplantation in the rainy season



Mariamnagar High School



Students' assembly before begin the classes in the school



Some female students of the Mariamnagar Primary School



Some teachers of the Mariamnagar High School



Main entrance of the Mission



Church house



Frontal upper view of the church. It is decorated with few illustrations of Garo life and culture. *Jishuna Rason* means salutation through Jesus, *Gitel-ko- mitel-bo* means worship to God



This Cross was constructed near the church in 2000 in commemoration of Jesus Christ



Prayer bell of the mission, known as "Big Bell",  
made in London by John Warner and Sons in 1882



Health Centre of the Mission



Graveyard



Graveyard



A Garo couple of the village living in Dhaka



Two beauticians of the village in front of a Beauty Parlor in Dhaka



A Garo woman working in a Beauty Parlor of Dhaka



A young salesperson of the village in a ready made clothe store in Dhaka





The researcher in the field



The researcher participating Wangala festival in the village



The researcher taking bath in a village pond



The researcher flanked by Garo children of the village