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The Impact of Cultural Diffusion and Globalization: Basic Study on Garo Ethnic Community of Bangladesh

Abu Ibrahim Mohd. Nurul Huda

Abstract: Garo is one of the major ethnic communities living in Bangladesh. Usually these people prefer to name them as ‘Mandi’ instead of Garo. In Bangladesh, only the Abeng, the Attongs, the Braks, the Chiboks, the Duals, and the Megams – these six sub-tribes are the majority among other linguistic and social groups. It is being apprehended that as Garos are closely staying with Bangalis for a long period and due to cultural hegemony of western nations the Garo ethnic community is facing and experiencing some sort of changes in their social structure. Some of the basic objectives of this study are: to investigate the changing process and impact of the influential cultures on the family structure, customs, behavior and conduct, matriarchal and matrilineal family structure, ethnic religions, education etc. of the Garos. It is worthy for the anthropologists and sociologists to conduct an in-depth and basic studies on the changing process of socio-economic and cultural context of Garos due to cultural diffusion and globalization before they are being merged with the dominating culture. The study has selected three sub-districts (upazilla) of Netrokona and Mymensingh districts, as because the six sub-tribes of Garo community live dispersedly in these sub-districts. Unions and villages have been selected on the basis of Simple Random sampling procedure. A grand total of 180 HHs have been taken as total samples for face to face interview. Following Deliberate and Purposive sampling procedure these samples have been extracted. The study has followed historical method, survey method, FGD, and some sorts of sociological research techniques, such as - photographs, recording, reviewing literature and folklores of Garos. The study has apprehended a profound change in marriage, family system of the Garos. Simultaneously, the Garos are embracing changes in their customs related to clothing and daily behavior, social and political organization, religious beliefs, higher education, migration and spatial mobility, and changes in five elements of culture.

Keywords : Mandi, Bodo, Khasim, Chratangrang, Sangsarek, Wangala, Rensanggri, Dokmanda, Sang- Nakma.

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1. Statement of the Problem

In Bangladesh the numbers of ethnic groups are unsettled matter of fact. Renowned Anthropologist of Bangladesh Kibriaul Khaleque in an online article stated that people belonging to more than two dozen ethnic communities live in Bangladesh but the primary census report of 2011 illustrates that total ethnic population groups of Bangladesh are 27 in numbers. Garo is one of the major ethnic communities living in Bangladesh. Usually these people prefer the name '**Mandi**' instead of Garo. According to BANGALAPEDIA (National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh): Garo, the once a nomadic tribe of the Bodo group of Mongoloids are now living in different areas of Bangladesh and in the adjacent states of India¹. This community is living dispersedly in the greater region of Mymensingh, specially, in Natilabari, Haluaghat, Sherpur, Kamalakanda, northern part of Shreebordi sub-district, Muktagachha, Nokhla, Birishiri of Durgapur sub-district, Bhaluka, Jamalpur, Tangail, Bhawal of Gazipur district, Shreepur, and Roumari of Rangpur district. Various studies on Garos have provided many statements that this ethnic group is not the aborigines in Bangladesh; rather they have migrated from Tibet. Thereafter, the Garos migrated themselves to the northeastern area of India through Bhutan. Garos were found living at the feet of Garo hill in northern area of Bangladesh during 9th century, establishing the empire of Garo at Durgapur from 9th to 13th century². A. Playfair states "It is probably only a legend, but there does exist among the Garos a very distinct story of their migration from Tibet; of their arrival in the plains at the foot of the Himalayas; of their wanderings eastward up the Brahmaputra valley ..."³. Ellen Bal has consented on the same assumption referred by many other academicians and officials⁴. Ellen Bal has consented on the same assumption referred by many other academicians and officials . In Bangladesh, only the Abeng, the Attongs, the Braks, the Chiboks, the Duals, and the Megams –

¹Bangalapedia (National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh),retrieved from http://www.banglapedia.org/HT/G_0043.HTM on 10/10/2014ohila College, Dhaka

²Jengcham, Subash, 1994, Bangladesher Garo Sampradai, Bangla Academy, Dhaka, p.1-3.

³Playfair, A. 1909, The Garos, (Published under the orders of the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam), David Nutt, London, p. 8.

⁴see, Bal, Ellen, 2007, They Ask If We Eat Frogs – Garo Ethnicity in Bangladesh, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) Publishing, Singapore, p. 41.

these six sub-tribes are found to live. In earlier days, these sub-tribes lived in their specific defined areas but nowadays, they live together. Their habitations are mixed up. In spite of this, the specific sub-tribe's residing area could be traced where these community people have been usually residing generation after generation.

Garos community is divided into two distinct parts: '**Achchhick Garo**' and '**Lamdani Garo**'. Achchhick Garo used to live in hilly regions and Lamdani Garo used to live in plain land. Garo is one of the matriarchal and matrilineal community living in Bangladesh, except among the Khasis; it does not appear among any other races and tribes in Bangladesh. They are maintaining their ethnic distinctiveness for more than four thousand years. The Garos are nourishing their ethnic cultural tradition, customs, rituals, religious beliefs, economic systems, family systems, political systems, values, folklore but in spite of that distinctiveness their cultural assimilation is going on due to cultural diffusion and cultural globalization. Lamdani people have come into close relation with Bangalis living in these areas. The Garos, especially, the Lamdani Garos are enjoying spatial mobility and free movement. Their children are moving towards the nearest urban areas or to the capital city for higher education and for job seeking. As Garos are closely staying with Bangalis for a long period and due to cultural hegemony of Bangalis and western nations the Garo ethnic community is facing and experiencing some sort of changes in their social structure. Younger Garos are being more inclined to Bangalee culture and language. Contiguously, due to the values and beliefs of Christianity and Islam this ethnic community is facing some sort of direct and indirect influence and dominance upon their culture.

This study has inclined to identify the factors affecting the cultural changes among the Garos living in Bangladesh. The study has focused some changes on Garo marriage system, family structure, Garo customs related to clothing and daily behavior, Garo social and political organization, Garo Sangsarek religious beliefs, values, rituals and change, higher education and mobility in Garo society, satellite culture and information technology in Garo society. The five cultural traits, likely, language, symbols, norms, values, beliefs, cognitive elements have also been brought under the consideration of changing process.

2. Objectives of the Study

There are some basic objectives of this study. These are:

- To investigate the changing process of family structure among the Garos, if any;
- Is there any change in the customs related to clothing and daily behavior and conduct;
- Is there any distinctly marked changing process in social and political organizations of Garos;
- Is there any impact of capitalism and western culture on matriarchal and matrilineal family structure;
- Is there any impact of Bangalee and Western culture on their ethnic religious beliefs, values, rituals;
- To study the impact of higher education (mobility) among the Garos.

3. Limitation of the Study

Before paying visit to the investigating areas the study has assumed some limitations to face. But most of these assumed limitations have not been found during field visit. However, the assumed limitations are:

- While the team visits to collect data from the respondents, they may be very busy;
- There may be language or communication gap;
- Lack of proper time to conduct with Garo ethnic people;
- Sometimes they may be filled with fear;
- Respondents may not answer properly to the questions;
- They can feel bored.

4. Justification of the Study

It is worthy for the anthropologists and sociologists to conduct in-depth and basic studies on the changing process of socio-economic and cultural context of Garos due to cultural diffusion and globalization before they are being merged with the dominating culture. Being a cultural anthropologist and sociologist I have inclined to conduct a study on each of the existing sub-tribes (six as mentioned above) of Garo community living in dispersed areas of different districts of Bangladesh. To eradicate and avoid the assumed limitations, a native sociologist of Garo community has included as Research Associate of this study. A local young and educated youth from Garo has been recruited as interpreter and key informant. With the help of different

sub-group people the team has enjoyed the privilege to enter inside the community and build up rapport with them. Obviously, this approach has enhanced and enriched the scope of information collected. This study has intended to identify the indicators and process of changes and to justify my assumptions. The study has inclined to grasp the changing circumstances sprawling its position over the cultural arena of Garo community. The younger generation of this community admits verbally about the changing process in different sphere of their cultural systems but no sort of anthropological or social endeavor is being noticed to record the process. So I have felt the essentiality to study these circumstances.

5. Study Area

For the purpose of the study three sub-districts (upazilla) of Netrokona and Mymensingh districts have been selected. The six sub-tribes of Garo community live dispersedly in these sub-districts. These sub-districts are Durgapur sub-district of Netrokona (Attong, Abeng and Brak) [*Union Gopalpur (Durgapur sub-district) village Gopalpur (Attong); union Kullagara (Durgapur sub-district) village Ranikhong (Abeng); Pouroshobha Durgaur (Durgapur sub-district) village Paschim Utrail (Brak)*]; Kalmakanda sub-district of Netrokona (Megam) [*union Rangchhati (Kalmakanda sub-district) village Kandapara (Megam)*]; Dhobaura sub-district of Mymensingh (Chibok and Dual) [*union Dhobaura (Dhobaura sub-district) village Gangerbhera (Chibok); union Gamaritola (Dhobaura sub-district) village Uttar Langol Jora (Dual)*].

6. Sampling of the Study

Five Unions, one Pouroshobha and six villages have been selected on the basis of Simple Random sampling procedure. Total 30 HHs from each sub-tribe have been brought under the interview process. So a grand total of 180 HHs (6 sub-tribe x 30 HHs from each = 180 samples) have been total samples. These samples have followed Deliberate or Purposive sampling procedure. The HHs of the sub-tribes have been divided into two parts on the basis of distance of their living areas from the sub-district head quarters. The reasoning behind this is to compare the impact of close staying with the influential culture. We know the members who have the privilege to enjoy the spatial mobility will be more accustomed with cultural diffusion. To grasp the changes, some in-depth special and interesting case studies from each sub-tribe have been conducted and these cases have been selected on the basis of available information in